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**THE REDEMPTION OF NATURE:  
ACCOUNTS OF ATONEMENT IN JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S  
THEOLOGY**

**DEE CARTER**

A thesis submitted to  
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in accordance with the requirements of the degree of  
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I should like to express my thanks to Dr Peter Scott for his kindness, patience and forbearance and also for his ever willingness to help. And, in sadness, I am thankful for the guidance, encouragement and comradeship of the late Professor Colin Gunton. I miss him greatly.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to contribute to the task of Christian theology by exploring how accounts of the atonement might embrace all nature, human and non-human. Since Jürgen Moltmann's work has been ecologically oriented and has offered substantial discussion within the theological tradition, the heart of the study lies in its analysis of his underlying redemptive schema, which is tested for its adequacy as a model of atonement. The contribution of the study is fourfold. (i) It seeks to articulate what Moltmann has done in terms of the language and logic of atonement theory. (ii) It proposes that, although Moltmann himself does not make this clear, the key aspect of his underlying schema is the construal of a suffering God that functions as a working atonement metaphor, which he reiterates in other ways by analogous correspondence. (iii) It shows that he has neglected a necessary aspect of soteriological theory, namely, the atonement metaphor of sacrifice, and that a fundamental misunderstanding of sacrifice accounts for this. (iv) It proposes how this deficiency might be remedied, within his own theological framework, by developing a Christology of the cosmic suffering servant that is able to express the atonement metaphor of sacrifice in the context of the redemption of nature.

The sequence of the argument is as follows. The first chapter sets out the broad context for this study within a Christian soteriological tradition where the non-human creation has not been a focus. It discusses a range of ways in which modern theology has responded to the ecological crisis, itself a part of the crisis of secularism, concluding that Moltmann's work is potentially helpful as a way forward. Chapter 2 narrows the context to an analysis of the language and logic of atonement theory, with particular application to their relation to the redemption of nature. The need for an objective account of atonement is shown and Moltmann provides again a helpful example. Chapter 3 depicts Moltmann's theologising as a whole as a response to secular modernity and indicates how his ecological theology grounds his soteriology and his call for a cosmic Christ. An exploration of the accounts of atonement within Moltmann's theology is provided in Chapter 4, which also establishes that he operates with an atonement metaphor of suffering related through categories of analogous correspondence to non-human nature. The final chapter highlights the deficiency of his redemptive schema in its neglect of the key atonement metaphor of sacrifice and proposes, as a further development of analogous correspondence, the atonement metaphor of sacrifice as expressed through the cosmic suffering servant.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed ..... Date .....



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## Chapter I: Introduction to the issues

The broad context of this theological research is the ecological situation: that this situation is one of crisis is taken as a premiss of the study. It is concerned with the compelling theological task presented by and within this broad context. Arguably the event that set the scene for ecotheological thinking was the third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961,<sup>1</sup> when Joseph Sittler delivered an address in which he claimed that Christianity's relevance depends upon its relatedness to our care of the earth and its affirmation of our materiality as a part of nature. Thus the study might be construed as a form of contextual theology:<sup>2</sup> theology which attempts to take account of what might be understood as non-theological, and in this case, scientific criteria. It might be questioned whether such criteria are the stuff of the Gospel or the material of the vision of God's Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> But if theology is an attempt to understand and articulate God's engagement with the world, then hope in the ultimate goal that is summed up in the concept of *shalom*, - peace, justice and the integrity of creation - is a commitment that is not merely an ethical imperative arising out of a particular historical situation. Rather all the processes of life in its materiality are always already at stake in the theological task.

That theology in, and shaped by, an ecological context is a relatively new endeavour does not mean that the task has not always been there to be done;

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter W Bakken, Joan Gibb Engel, and J Ronald Engel, Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith, (Westport: Greenwood, 1995). They write: "[T]he heightened awareness of the finite and fragile beauty of planet Earth in the face of the threat of nuclear holocaust struck Sittler and others of his generation with the force of revelation." 7.

<sup>2</sup> Contextual theology is theology of engagement with particular discourses; e.g. political theology, feminist theology, ecological theology. These are attempts to correlate understanding of God's engagement with the world with particular construals of either political practice, or with gender relations, or in relation with humankind and the natural world. Attempts at contextualisation need to guard against falling into one or other of two related errors - cultural insensitivity or cultural accommodation: see Colin Greene, 'Is the Message of the Cross Good News for the Twentieth Century?' in John Goldingay (ed.) Atonement Today (London: SPCK, 1995) 223.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Watson finds such theologies unsatisfactory because he considers that the reality of God is somehow 'filtered' or 'qualified' through its correlation with 'these relatively autonomous construals' concerned with a 'reality other than the reality of God'. Francis Watson, "What is Trinitarian Theology?" Paper given at Research Day, C&G CHE, January 17 1997. Against this it might be argued that theology is not some discrete, 'pure' pursuit, but instead is always already feminist, ecological and liberative where these discourses are genuinely insightful and hence, are disclosive of the reality of God. A related point from Vernon White, "...academic theology I take to be a worthwhile, but limited, part of theology as a whole (which must include many other 'adjectival' theologies to be a whole." Atonement and Incarnation, (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 5.



simply that certain theological issues have been marginalised or not addressed fully in the past. The Church of Jesus Christ has been understood as a community of believers, and while this is certainly the case, it is not all of the case: the community of faith exists within the world and, as a part of God's creation, is an expression of the world. It is a part of the whole that lives and moves and has its being in God: the whole creation which will be returned to God.

Within this ecological context and theological responses to it, the study is concerned specifically with the question of what is involved in the theological task of understanding how atonement might be construed appropriately such that it will account persuasively for the redemption of all things. The study is not, then, one of ecological theology *per se*; rather it is concerned with atonement and soteriological theory and how this might be applied to the non-human creation. It is an attempt to understand what might be meant by the work of Christ's self-giving on the cross where its effects are inclusive of all of God's creation, human and non-human. There is thus a dual focus to this study: it is an enquiry both into the tradition of atonement theory, and also into the way this might be related appropriately within, and to, a particular context - the context of the ecological crisis.

There is a long tradition of atonement theory, which, like all theological doctrine, is constantly revisable, within limits. Theory is 'traditioned' on, and conditioned by the selective embrace of fresh insights, for there can be no final theology. Doctrine must be provisional, always open to God's continued self-disclosure. Theological doctrines are thus not arid *compendia* set in stone: rather they are hypotheses for testing, and so theology has to be done over and over again. This provisionality is particularly marked in the case of atonement, where there has never been any single, privileged and authoritative account in the sense of a specific credal statement to clarify its meaning. "Creeds and councils have pronounced upon the nature of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, but have never tried to pin down the exact meaning of the atonement."<sup>4</sup>

To try continually to envision, and re-envision, what the cross of Christ might mean is a fundamental task of theology: a literally crucial engagement. Our

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement (London: DLT, 1993) 5. Also The Doctrine Commission of the C of E, The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift (London: CHP): "Christian tradition taken as a whole has seemed intuitively to recognise this fact of the diversity of images for atonement in the New Testament and has not tried to impose one particular theory as an agreed dogma." 97.

understandings of atonement have been construed in the form of metaphors, each of which has been culturally and historically conditioned; these metaphors are attempts to express in some way, the diversity of construals of atonement that originate in a range of New Testament texts. For example, Paul's letter to the Romans gives expression to the notion that we are justified through God's gift which is an act of grace, unmerited by 'us' (Rom. 5.8); Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification through grace and we are received in faith (Rom. 4.25), so that our participation in Christ's death and resurrection joins us inseparably to his love (Rom. 8.39).

But any way of understanding this is far from obvious, and also these most basic messages which form the heart of the gospel give rise to contingent questions, not least how Christ's death might achieve such a result. Again a wide range of biblical images can be called upon to throw a partial light to illuminate in some way one aspect or another. For example, John's Gospel offers up Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, (1.29), and who dies along with the Passover sacrifices (19.31f), silently (19.9). John gives us also Christ the Good Shepherd giving up his life of his own volition (10.11), whose voice is recognised by his own (10.4), and who makes silent his enemies (18.6). Thus it is a fundamental theological task to struggle to find meaning and understanding here, both theoretically and in the sense of a related practice.

The subject of the atonement is absolutely central in Christian theology; and it is directly related to that of the nature of God. Each and every interpretation of the atonement is most clearly connected with some conception of the essential meaning of Christianity, and reflects some conception of the Divine nature. Indeed, it is in some conception of the nature of God that every doctrine of the atonement has its ultimate ground.<sup>5</sup>

Aulén's assertion raises here two particularly relevant issues: 'some conception of the essential meaning of Christianity' and 'some conception of the Divine nature.' In a sense doctrine is doubly renderable: first, in relation to context, and secondly, in relation to an understanding of God. How these conceptions have been understood historically may well be perfectly valid - but these will certainly not be exhaustive in their scope. For in the long history of atonement theory insufficient

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<sup>5</sup> Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1931/71) 12-3.



attention has been paid to the question of trying to understand how Christ saves the non-human creation, as soteriological theory has tended to stress and prioritise the salvation of humankind. Looking to scripture and tradition for some guidance here, one might suggest that a 'conception of the essential meaning of Christianity' would construe human creaturely failings and their consequences in the context of the creatureliness of all things, and it would also find the universal scope of redemption through Christ for the whole of creation as God's purpose, as 'some conception of the Divine nature.'

John 3.16 makes clear that it is the world - the cosmos - that is the object of his redeeming concern. This moves us away from construing God's reconciling love in relation only to the subjective existential state of sin and guilt in terms of the individual person - an exclusive concept - towards the objective consequences in the world of the historical accumulation of such human sin and guilt - an inclusive concept. That is, the very particularity of Christianity, in a sense its exclusivity, is the key to its eschatological inclusivity: the crucified Christ is Wisdom, while Wisdom is the key to all life. As Gunton puts it, "[C]hristology universalises: but the universal salvation must then take concrete shape in particular parts of the creation...It is the function of God the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, to *particularise* the universal redemption in anticipation of the eschatological redemption."<sup>6</sup>

It is then, this inclusive, universal salvation wrought through an exclusive, particular concept that calls for the expression of what atonement might mean; that invites ways to construe reasonably the work of Christ on the cross - an event of the most marked historical particularity. But it must also be considered how the fruit of this work is mediated to us and to the world. As Fiddes asks - noting also that 'this is an aspect of atonement that is often glossed over' - "How can a particular event in the past have an effect upon our experience of salvation today?"<sup>7</sup>

One way of understanding this mediation derives from the Early Church tradition of the assumption of human nature,<sup>8</sup> in which incorporation into Christ is contingent on the fact of the Incarnation. Redemption is thus possible precisely and *only* because Christ assumes the reality of our broken nature, and, since we

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Gunton, The Actuality of Atonement (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989) 170.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement *op. cit.* ix.

<sup>8</sup> This is one of the 'bridge' concepts outlined by John McIntyre, The Shape of Soteriology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992). These will be discussed later.

are already incorporated into Christ via the Incarnation, his death on the cross becomes our death with him. Hence we are taken out of our decaying mortality and incorporated into imperishable immortal life. Gunton,<sup>9</sup> observing the continuity with orthodox atonement theology since Athanasius, writes that atonement is necessary on account that the universal human relatedness to God was breached such that the consequences could be dealt with only through the Incarnate Person of the Son. And he argues further that, as an act of God, atonement is directed eschatologically to the redemption of all creation, and is universal in its concern for the reconciliation of all things. The universal scope of christology is also made clear by Athanasius, thus

... the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. (I/1) For He alone ... was ... both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father... the ... Word of God entered our world... He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who ... fills all things that are (II/7,8) .... He actually contained all things Himself. In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it; ordering, directing, giving life to all .... as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe, and as Son He was in constant union with the Father...<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the scriptural source offers implicit witness to the universal scope of the redemption wrought by Christ. For example, McIntyre comments on Ephesians 1:10, extending the notion of assumption thus: "So God gathered up the entirety of the universe, nature as well as man, in the single redemptive act of the death of Christ, and the benefits of that redemption were deployed cosmically into the whole of the universe, and God's purpose for the whole of creation was consummated."<sup>11</sup>

McIntyre seems here not to be expressing the eschatological nature of God's purposes of universal redemption that Gunton makes clear, but despite this, the point remains that the primary sources of theology - scripture and tradition - invite understanding of how atonement might be construed to account for all creation. However, soteriological theory generally has concentrated on the salvation of

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<sup>9</sup> Colin Gunton, "Universal and Particular in Atonement Theology," Religious Studies 28 (1992): 453-66.

<sup>10</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (III/17) (London: Mowbrays, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* *op. cit.* 106.



humankind. (Arguably this tendency has been shaped by an understanding of the mediation of Christ's work as stressing imputation and identification, framed in personal language and hence invoking personal categories.) And Anne Primavesi argues that the Christian practice of the Church has been consistently dysfunctional in relation to the non-human creation, while making clear also that this is *despite* the resources of the early tradition:

As long as sin/salvation rituals dominate Christian practice, ... cutting off of the non-human world from the church's ministry will continue. Its own perception of its role in salvation, as sole mediator between God and the world through its possession of the Spirit, effectively breaks the relationship between the Spirit and the whole of creation. Therefore it also breaks the bond between the Trinity and creation, a bond traditionally expressed in the doctrine of the "economic" Trinity. This treats of the process of God's self-disclosure addressed to creation in the three-fold aspect of Father, Son and Spirit. While this notion of economy seems to bear little relation to what is now understood by the word, among its original meanings was the popular understanding of it as distribution, organisation and arrangement of a number of factors; in this case, the ordering of right relationships between the whole of creation and different aspects of God recorded in the tradition (Father, Son and Spirit). It is also noteworthy that the earliest reference to the "divine economy" occurs in Ignatius's Epistle to the Ephesians (XVIII,2), where the words *oikonomia theou* refer to what one might call "God's management of the divine household." The Greek original has the same root (*oikos*: house, home, inhabited world) as ecology and ecumenism. It seems fair to say that the department marked "human salvation" appears not only to have taken over all the others but has effectively closed them down.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps though, it might be claimed that atonement theology - christology which is concerned specifically with the work, rather than the person of Christ - has been 'much neglected in recent years',<sup>13</sup> that is, not 'a lively aspect of the discipline'.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, more recently there seems to some extent, a renewed interest in discussion of what is undoubtedly a central doctrinal matter.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Anne Primavesi, "Ecofeminism and Canon" in R S Gottlieb (ed.), This Sacred Earth (NY: Routledge, 1996) 334-45. See also her From Apocalypse to Genesis (London: Burns and Oates, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 2.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Sykes (ed), Sacrifice and Redemption (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 1.

<sup>15</sup> For example - Ian Bradley, The Power of Sacrifice, (London: DLT, 1995); Doctrine Commission of the C of E, *op. cit.*; Paul Fiddes, *op. cit.*; John Goldingay (ed.) *op. cit.*; Timothy Gorringer, God's Just Vengeance (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement *op. cit.*; Martin Hengel, The Cross of the Son of God, (London: SCM, 1981); John McIntyre, *op. cit.*; John Moses, The Sacrifice of God, (Norwich: Canterbury, 1992); Ulrich Simon, Atonement:

This enquiry is concerned with how an ecological christology might be understood and developed; how the work of the cross might be related to the non-human creation in the context of the ecological crisis and against the background of theological responses to it. "Theories of atonement are somewhat like lymphocytes in the body: they are solutions going around looking for a problem, and taking the shape of a problem as it is identified..."<sup>16</sup> And a contemporary problem that has been identified is that of the ecological situation. That it is pressing and urgent is multiply attested, for example:

The initial premise that we today are facing a large and seemingly intractable ecological crisis - nightmare some would say - seems irrefutable. While debate rages as to the precise extent of the damage in certain cases ... almost all informed observers concur that the earth and its various ecosystems are groaning in travail. The plight of the earth is all too real.<sup>17</sup>

It is a premiss of this study that any theological response to the ecological crisis, that is intended to be understood as genuinely Christian theological, must offer an account of atonement, for clearly this is a central engagement of the theological task. "Christianity, as the name implies, has Jesus Christ at its very centre, so that if christology is concentrated on a study of Jesus Christ, it is not so much a branch of Christian theology as its central theme..."<sup>18</sup> In the context of the ecological situation, and as an attempt at a 'firmer securing of the original proposal', Sittler pressed for Christology 'to be unfolded to the dimensions of its intrinsic fullness', and, insisting on the 'absolute relatedness of all things', made the following methodological point:

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from *Holocaust to Paradise*, (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1987); Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); Stephen Sykes (ed.) *Sacrifice and Redemption op. cit.*; *The Story of Atonement*, (London: DLT, 1997); Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 97.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology* (Georgia: AAR, 1995) 5-6. See also, *inter alia*, Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (NY: Orbis, 1997); Dieter Hessel (ed.) *After Nature's Revolt* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), *Theology for Earth Community* (NY: Orbis, 1996). R S Gottlieb (ed.) *This Sacred Earth* (NY: Routledge, 1996). Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (NY: OUP, 1996); Charles Birch, William Eakin, Jay McDaniel (eds.) *Liberating Life* (NY: Orbis, 1990); Mary MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (eds.) *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995). These concerns are expressed in relation to a whole range of academic enquiries; at a symposium of the Congress of Ecology in 1998, insights from the disciplines of history, philosophy, jurisprudence, politics, theology, landscape aesthetics, and wilderness thought were presented. Beyond *academia*, the ecological situation is discussed frequently and in an informed way via serious journalism.

<sup>18</sup> John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM, 1990) 3.



I am what I am not only as one with, among, and in self-forming transactions with men; I am who I am in relation to the web, structure, process and placenta of nature. And because and insofar as contemporary theology ignores that - ... - its reflections about the adequacy of redemption in Christ will be uninteresting because insufficiently real ... If the self is to be redeemed by Christ, and if that self is unspecifiable apart from its embeddedness in the world as nature, then "the whole creation" of the Book of Genesis and of Romans 8 is seen as the logically necessary scope of christological speech.<sup>19</sup>

The ecological crisis and its implications are now high on the agenda of many intellectual inquiries, a situation which, for David Lyon, represents a 'symbolic sea-change' of 'contemporary - post 1960s - society.'<sup>20</sup> In general cultural terms, responses to the crisis offer a range of options: the problems are addressed, for example, through the discourses of Process Philosophy, Deep Ecology, Value Ethics, Ecofeminism and Political Theory. That this is the case seems to make Lyon's point that attitudes that once might have been dismissed as counter cultural 'juvenile reflex of Californian affluence' are now central cultural themes.

Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, various campaigns for nuclear disarmament and for the politics of ecology, feminism and women's liberation, food and educational co-operatives, and appropriate technology all bear witness to the permeation of public life by the kinds of values and attitudes which once were seen as the domain of the counter culture.<sup>21</sup>

Modern theology has offered various proposals, which are inevitably informed by, and stand in relation, to these discourses; and the past thirty years or so have seen a range, indeed a proliferation of theological responses to the ecological crisis, and together this range might be termed 'ecological theology'.<sup>22</sup> From within theology,

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Sittler, "The Scope of Christological Reflection," *Interpretation* XXVI/3 (July 1972): 328-337.

<sup>20</sup> David Lyon, *The Steeple's Shadow: On the Myths and Realities of Secularisation* (London: SPCK, 1985) 106.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 107. See also Bernice Martin, *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) for a discussion of how ecology came to be the cosmology that grounded much post-1960s social critique.

<sup>22</sup> As an indication, Bakken, Engel and Engel, *op. cit.* is a bibliographical survey under eleven headings, related to Christian faith, *viz.* Historical and Cultural, Biblical Interpretation, Theological and Philosophical, Ethical, Feminist Criticism, Science and Technology, Social and Political, Economics and Sustainability, Land and Resource Use, Church and Mission, Institutional and Organisations, detailing "over five hundred articles, essays, and books by some three hundred authors between the years 1961 and 1993..." *op. cit.* xv. However, this is far from exhaustive: it is limited, *inter alia*, to English language, or translated literature that is primarily of North American origin. Also, see Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *Ecotheology* 4 (1998): 8-19.



there have been calls other than from Sittler to re-examine Christian tradition and doctrine, which have also set up an agenda.<sup>23</sup> Ecological theology is also a response to the charge laid at Christianity's door that the exploitative outlook which has engendered the crisis is the result of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The impetus to this charge was in large measure driven by an essay written by the historian Lynn White and published first in 1967, entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis".<sup>24</sup> This short essay has been outstandingly influential, and is now seen as something of a classic in ecological literature. White argues that the main strands of Christian tradition<sup>25</sup> embody damaging attitudes. For example, he writes that "[M]an named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes."<sup>26</sup>

Ecological theology is, then, a relatively new endeavour, a distinctly late twentieth century phenomenon, responding as it does, first to a sense of crisis, and

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As he observes, it "is no longer possible to keep up with the number of books and articles published in ecotheology."

<sup>23</sup> For example, Gordon Kaufman's call that "...the nuclear age into which humankind has now moved - an age in which it is possible we may utterly destroy not only civilisation but humanity itself - challenges scholars in theology and in the study of religion to do some radical re-thinking about our disciplines and about some of the presuppositions taken for granted in our work". Theology for a Nuclear Age (Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1985) vii. Kaufman had previously offered a key to these 'presuppositions': "A number have argued that the Christian understanding of the world as God's creation governed by divine law, with humans its divinely appointed overlords, was an important presupposition of the development of modern experimental natural science, and thus of our modern understanding of nature. But it can also be argued that this same complex of presuppositions must bear considerable responsibility for the unrestricted exploitation of nature which now threatens to destroy the delicate ecological balances that sustain all life. Therefore it cannot be regarded as self-evident that the traditional Christian view is either adequate or appropriate any longer to provide orientation in life." The Theological Imagination (Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1981) 220.

<sup>24</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Science 155 (1967): 1203-7. This has been republished many times in ecological collections. For example, in Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, eds. Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology, (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), pp 25-35; RJ Berry, ed. The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Care, (Leicester: IVP, 2000), pp 31-42.

<sup>25</sup> In contrast though, White is generous in his praise for St Francis, and in his final sentence proposes him as a patron saint for ecologists. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *op. cit.* 35.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* 30-1. Lynn White seems here very confident that the mind of God can be so easily read! But the concept of 'naming' needs discussing against its Biblical context: in what seems an anti-realist stress on human constructing, White understands surely rightly the violence that is done by autonomous naming, but he does not see the *blessing* of true naming when this is done by Adam as the first human act as God's image bearer. As Nik Ansell proposed in his paper entitled "The House of Being and the Dwelling of God" given at the Research Conference, Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol, 2 November 1996, the naming of the animals should be understood as *creatio per verbum*, that is in the light of the Divine speech. And as such, God's creative process has an open-ended quality about it, and brings all living things into covenantal relationship with God.

secondly, to a charge of complicity. As it happens, White's accusations are hardly new: some of the central criticisms in his essay owe something of a debt to Schopenhauer, who cast charges of dualism and anthropocentrism at Christianity some 150 years earlier in his essay on religion.<sup>27</sup> But at that time, this struck no chord in contemporary consciousness and so this essay resulted in no public interest. The concept may be logically prior to the experience, but as history has always shown, timing is all-important: theory serves as a material force when it has some grip on the public imagination.<sup>28</sup> When Schopenhauer wrote, there was no concept or felt experience of an ecological crisis; White's essay, on the other hand, struck a chord which resonated with modern analyses of reality.

However contentious much of the content and premisses of White's essay may be,<sup>29</sup> it is surely 'true' insofar as it shows how the Genesis texts and the Christian tradition can be so misconstrued through a crude analysis of them as indeed to engender, or at least encourage and perpetuate, anthropocentric attitudes. For White's account of the history of exploitative attitudes is an account not only of his own misperceptions but also one of the history of misperceptions. In other

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms* (London: Penguin, 1970) (This is a selection of Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, originally published in 1851.) For example, in his essay on religion, he writes, *inter alia*, "Another fundamental error of Christianity is that it has sundered mankind from the animal world to which it essentially belongs and now considers mankind alone of any account, regarding the animals as no more than things" 187.

<sup>28</sup> See Marx's Introduction to 'Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 257. However any kind of 'engine and steam' theory must necessarily be a dialectical process: as Helvétius noted, 'our ideas are the necessary consequences of the societies in which we live.' See George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980) 15.

<sup>29</sup> Although the influence of White's essay is not disputed, the substantial points of his case are. Some have stressed the positive resources in Scripture, e.g. John Austin Baker 'Biblical Views of Nature', pp 9-26 in *Liberating Life*, *op. cit.* which insists on a plurality of views within the Bible, and hence that any account is a theological selection, rather than biblical exegesis; and also in some of her early work, Rosemary Radford Ruether makes the point that scripture has been historically misinterpreted, and that the Hebrew Bible offers in fact our best resource for a theology of eco-justice, citing Isaiah 24 as its most eloquent relevant statement. Nevertheless she is not here accepting the 'stewardship' model as acceptable or adequate in providing a vision of a new and different economic order for it does not address the question of "the re-ordering of access to and use of natural resources within a just economy." 'The Biblical Vision of the Ecological Crisis', in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, edited by Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 75-81. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson argues that any attitude of domination is discontinuous with the revelation of both testaments in *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984). James Nash argues for the acknowledgement of positive resources within the Christian tradition, finding sensitivity to ecological concerns in its history, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). A different but related charge is the claim that Westerners may be particularly prone to read the situation as catastrophe because the culture has been influenced by the apocalyptic religion of Christianity. Martin Palmer, *Genesis or Nemesis: belief, meaning and ecology*, (London: Dryad Press, 1988).



words, White's essay does yield a form of truth, although it might be claimed that a basic premiss of his argument - that by 'destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects' - is founded on inadequate analysis and inappropriate naming of what Christianity is or might be. That Christianity, with the status of official religion, throughout many centuries, has contributed frequently to further the causes of particular coercive power groups cannot be denied: but that does not mean that this is its true reality. That sociologically and ecologically dysfunctional effects can be seen for what they are, that is, precisely as *failure* to be true to the Gospel of Christ, is itself testimony that the essence of faith and truth lies elsewhere.

According to White's analysis, the Christian doctrine of creation is at the root of the ecological crisis caused by Western science and technology. The Genesis texts, he claims, authenticate humanity's dominance over nature as a part of God's plan, and thus Christianity is determinedly anthropocentric. As a result, Christianity not only established a dualism of humanity and nature, but it also fostered science and technology as instruments for the exploitation of nature. Thus the 'ecological complaint against Christianity' that its doctrine of creation must bear 'a huge burden of guilt' has in a real sense become a part of what might be understood as common stock of knowledge in this regard.

The relationship that Christianity has with the ecological crisis is not so much one of direct causality. Instead, it is one of legitimation of a developmental continuum of enabling causes.<sup>30</sup> Rather than the ecological crisis being the result of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is a superficial understanding of the Genesis creation narrative - stripped out of its broader theological context, and translated such as to give 'man' dominion (inadequately construed) over all other beings - which has served as legitimation for certain crucial developments. These were first, the mechanical model of nature as object that emerged from the Cartesian and Baconian philosophy of the Scientific Revolution - this tore the non-human creation away from God's sight, its existence merely for the benefit of people and to serve their ends - and secondly, the methodology of seventeenth century

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<sup>30</sup> Following from this point, some of the historical analysis of Christianity's relationship with the ecological crisis - a role of legitimation within a nexus of power relations - has been published: Dee Carter, 'Unholy Alliances: Religion, Science and Environment' *Zygon* 36/2 (June 2001): 357-372.



science which itself gave rise to Newtonian philosophy in particular, and the intellectual framework for Enlightenment ideas in general.<sup>31</sup>

Newton's scientific model of universal laws as the rule in nature became the ideal for all thought - philosophical and political. Science's directing role in society has had therefore, from the outset, an ideological component. In due course it would transform and inform central developments in modern culture; within history, society, politics, morality and technology, there has been no sphere of thought untouched by the consequences of this paradigm shift.<sup>32</sup> These developments shaped the social and intellectual beliefs which gave rise to the competitive and imperialist philosophy which has itself been fed back as the driving force of the unbridled technology of the last hundred years: all of which characterise the secular world.

The ecological crisis, wrought by exploitative attitudes towards non-human life (and, in a wider sense, to human life), and by the careless despoliation of God's world, is surely a manifestation of the broader problems of secularism: a loss of the sense of the sacred and a lack of respect for divine law. A consideration of the scientific ideas developed in, and emergent from, the modern period arguably provides a key to the prime causes of the ecological crisis: the development of an educated mind-set of otherwise seemingly civilised people convinced that humankind is the measure of all things and whose knowledge claims include a monopoly of saving values.

The modern world is in large measure the product of the Renaissance scholar and the clever capitalist, whereas the medieval world was in the main bequeathed by Roman imperialism and Christianity.<sup>33</sup> But secular humanism was in some measure the creation of a certain dualistic theology: the autonomous individual of the Enlightenment was invented first by theologians. The turning point of change

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<sup>31</sup> *Post hoc* rationalisation and conceptualisation has led often to reference to enlightenment ideas under the umbrella of The Enlightenment or The Enlightenment Project. But at the time there was no unified movement as such; there was a wide variety of endeavours, and enlightenment figures did not collaborate in the course of their different enterprises. Therefore it wasn't a 'project' at the time. "Enlightenment ...was an eclectic phenomenon." Olwen Hufton, Europe: Privilege and Protest 1730-89, (London: Fontana, 1980), 92. The term 'enlightenment' itself derives from an essay by Kant in 1784 entitled, "*Was ist Erklärung?*" His response established what was the single unifying factor among the various thinkers, scientists, *philosophes* of the period: the belief in free-will, man's (literally) final 'coming of age' and maturity as a rational being, all encapsulated in Kant's motto - *sapere aude* - dare to know.

<sup>32</sup> Olwen Hufton *op. cit.* 70ff. See also Robert M Young, 'Darwin' in David Herman ed. Late Great Britons (London: Brook, 1986) 52ff.

<sup>33</sup> Vivian H H Green, Renaissance and Reformation: a survey of European History between 1450 - 1660, (London: Arnold, 1985), 18ff.

began in the sixteenth century. It can be claimed that the Reformations of the sixteenth century - which tore the seamless robe of Christendom - planted not only the seeds of secularisation, but also of privatised religion and extreme individualism.

Henri de Lubac's historical analyses<sup>34</sup> suggest that it was the grace/nature dualism in Catholic theology - itself a response in order to protect, on the one hand, nature against Lutheranism, and on the other hand, grace against Enlightenment humanism - that effectively led to deism and atheism. But the culmination of this change was effected through the Scientific Revolution.<sup>35</sup> "Almost everything that distinguishes the modern world from earlier centuries is attributable to science, which achieved its most spectacular triumphs in the seventeenth century."<sup>36</sup> Observation and experimentation gave rise to new instrumentation and methods and promoted science's claim to objective truth, on the basis of its unique property of empirical verifiability.

One consequence was increased confidence in human mental capacity; and as this optimism led to the use of mechanical models in other fields, science became the paradigm of intellectual authority while theology and metaphysics were marginalised. Science was understood as the engine of progress in all things - indicating science's directing role in society and hence also its ideological component.<sup>37</sup>

Central to seventeenth century science were 'two outstanding codifiers of method':<sup>38</sup> René Descartes and Francis Bacon. It was "Descartes who enshrined

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<sup>34</sup>Henri de Lubac, *Surmaturel: Etudes Historiques* (1946), cited by Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings* (London: SPCK, 1997) 168ff.

<sup>35</sup> Historians agree there was a Scientific Revolution, but they disagree about when it was. Most agree broadly on the sixteenth or seventeenth century. I B Cohen *Revolution in Science* (Cambridge:Harvard,1985), favours the seventeenth, as agreed by Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, (London: Penguin,1978). Thomas makes a most persuasive point: "The essence of the revolution was the triumph of the mechanical philosophy. It rejected both scholastic Aristotelianism and the neo-Platonism that temporarily threatened to take its place." 769. Christopher Hill agrees but considers it to be one part of a century of revolutions generally, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 1975.) For my purposes, its precise timing is not important; the periods inter-relate, each marked by invention, innovation and new theory and these are not revolutionary *per se*. Ideas do not advance by their own logic and the Scientific Revolution was enabled by the cultural dynamism of sixteenth century Europe, and came to fruition in the seventeenth. It is its consequences that matter.

<sup>36</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (1946) (London: Routledge, 1991) 512.

<sup>37</sup> Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, (eds) *Revolution in History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) 32. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (London: Cardinal, 1989) 33f.

<sup>38</sup> I Bernard Cohen, *Revolution in Science op. cit.* 147.



Reason as the presiding god of modern culture,"<sup>39</sup> where reason would reconstrue the world via categories of mind. Rational thought consists only in clear and distinct propositions. The only thing that can be known clearly and distinctly is one's own consciousness: Descartes' first principle of method.<sup>40</sup> Consciousness enables thought: to doubt, understand, will, imagine, and sense. As Descartes conceived it - 'I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am'.

It was the *consequences* of this philosophy that determined attitudes to non-human life, for the innate capacity to reason became the defining feature of the human in contradistinction to the non-human. A century earlier animals had been construed as machine-like, not creatures of God. Descartes made this acceptable. Keith Thomas argues that its wide acceptance was because it provided a Christian rationalisation for certain, harsh treatment of animals.<sup>41</sup> Christianity has functioned here to legitimate particular practices, founded on a principle that robbed non-human life of its status as part of God's creation. But Cartesian thought was not atheism; rather, Descartes saw his work as the proper investigation of the nature of God. Nevertheless Cartesian method watered the seeds of secularity. Later Newton, a Unitarian who devoted a half of his working time to biblical study, would continue to nurture them. And when reason shaped the understanding of all things and this study of facts excluded any import of values, theology or metaphysics, only human presence was seen to embody any meaning within the world.<sup>42</sup>

Bacon was a revolutionary scientific ideologue. Influenced by Machiavelli, Bacon continued the tradition that rejected ancient authority as any model for the present. Against the background of a dynamic culture of new discoveries and world travel, Bacon imagined Utopia was in sight. He wrote with confidence, "I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make a *Utopia* of mine own, a *New Atlantis*, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statutes, as I list myself. And why may I not?"<sup>43</sup> The cult of 'me' is hardly a late modern phenomenon.

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<sup>39</sup> John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (London: Fontana, 1993) 118.

<sup>40</sup> René Descartes *Discourse on Method and the Meditations* 1637 (London: Penguin, 1968) 41.

<sup>41</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1983) 33-35. There were objections, e.g. from Henry More, for whom it was a 'murderous doctrine'. *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* *op. cit.* 118.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* 1627, cited by Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Renaissance Essays* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1985) 251.



But Bacon was also heir to two traditions of his own culture: Protestantism and magic. The heady combination of these brought about his belief that control of nature would liberate from the Fall: thus the mechanistic view of nature would free Christianity from its association - as he perceived it - with the paganism which deified nature and identified God with creation. While Bacon accepted the Fall, he rejected the full Calvinist doctrine of human depravity; for him, sin was the product of poverty and ignorance, and it was labour - the curse of fallen man - that would be the means through which he could rise again.<sup>44</sup> English thinkers of the seventeenth century, while disagreeing about the appropriate structures of State and Church, agreed on one thing: that the Old Testament gave a valid and comprehensive account of life and the universe. As such, Adam and Eve were the subject of much speculation and fascination, and there was wide consensus that Adam was the first practitioner of the arts and sciences.<sup>45</sup> Natural philosophers of very different persuasions, including Baconians, could understand themselves as restoring the lost knowledge of Adam. Thus we find Bacon's disciple, Comenius, aiming to 'restore man to the lost image of God, i.e. to the lost perfection of the free will, which consists in the choice of good and the repudiation of evil.'<sup>46</sup>

The popularisation of Bacon's ideas after 1640 thus helped to get rid of the shadow that had dogged humanity for so many centuries: the shadow of original sin. What alchemy and Calvinism had in common was that salvation came from without, from the philosopher's stone or the grace of God. Bacon extracted from the magical-alchemical tradition the novel idea that men could help themselves - mankind, not merely favoured individuals.<sup>47</sup>

This new science was construed as socially progressive and liberating: it was a case of 'learn the methods, do the experiment' - a humanist concept with a this-worldly thrust. The theory was claimed to be value-free and objective: of course, the practice was not, and nor could it have ever been. Scientific concepts, in particular the most fundamental of these, are ambiguous and based on values; they are inside the ruling intellectual culture and are expressions of contending values and social forces rather than above them.<sup>48</sup> The world in its crises bears witness to this: the period 1500-1800 was a crucial time when the stage was set for

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* *op. cit.* 164.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 15ff.

<sup>46</sup> Comenius, *Naturall Philosophie Reformed by Divine Light*, 1651, cited by Christopher Hill *The World Turned Upside Down* *op. cit.* 164.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* *op. cit.* 164.

<sup>48</sup> Robert M Young, 'Darwin' *op. cit.* 45.



both the development of intense interest in the natural world, as well as concerns about human relationships with it that have given rise to our present anxieties.<sup>49</sup>

Bacon presented nature as law-governed and mechanical; all activity was still attributed to God, but God was distanced from nature in order for nature to be available for experiment. Bacon's approach became axiomatic, and there was thus increasing sanction for 'man' to enact a particular understanding of what it means to have dominion over, and to subdue nature: 'to conquer nature' as Bacon would put it, for this was his interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative. The separation of divinity, humanity and nature had revolutionary consequences in enfranchising 'man's' rights, which have wrought dire repercussions for nature and ultimately for the whole eco-system.

The invoking of Christian ideas to function as legitimation is everywhere apparent. Christianity neither deifies nature, nor does it fail to hold a distinction between the Creator and the creature. Rather it does hold the natural world as God's own and it is this relation that renders an inviolability that Bacon would break down, while simultaneously participating in an apparently proper Christian enterprise: engaging in, indeed shaping, the study of God's created universe. It was in part Bacon's mode of expression that has wrought dire effects: his language is everywhere replete with lurid sexual imagery, as Midgley amply demonstrates:

Bacon had dismissed the Aristotelians as people who had 'stood impotent before Nature, destined never to lay hold of her and capture her.' Aristotle, said Bacon, being a mere contemplative, had 'left Nature herself untouched and inviolate'. By contrast, Bacon called upon the 'true sons of knowledge' to 'penetrate further' and 'to overcome Nature in action', so that 'passing by the outer courts of Nature, which many have trodden, we may find a way at length into her inner chambers'. Mankind would then be able, not just 'to exert a gentle guidance over Nature's course', but 'to conquer and subdue Nature, to shake her to her foundations' and to 'discover the secrets still locked in Nature's bosom'. Men [continued Bacon] ought to make peace among themselves so as to turn 'with united forces against the Nature of Things, to storm and occupy her castles and strongholds'. By these means scientists would bring about the 'truly masculine birth of time' by which they would subdue 'Nature with all her children, to bind her to your service and make her your slave'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, *op. cit.* 15.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Midgley *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1996) 77.



And rather depressingly, so it goes on: '[N]ature must be tortured into revealing her truth; her beautiful bosom laid bare; she must be held down and finally penetrated, pierced and vanquished'; these are words that recur constantly. Given that Bacon was inside contemporary culture and given that such talk was common currency, it must be conceded that the use of feminine pronouns for Nature and the portrayal of women as seductive and troublesome was not entirely new. Examples from ancient literature spring to mind: Gomer as Israel 'playing the harlot', and, of course, the maligned Xanthippe are examples of women taken to be in great need of the corrective influence and control of male reason.

Nevertheless, Midgley describes Bacon as 'something of a trail-blazer' in this matter. This language cannot be dismissed merely as typical of the crude manners of the seventeenth century but otherwise innocuous, for it takes all of God's gifts of creation, including time, and perverts and profanes them. It speaks of the brutalisation by men and of men: rather than sons, lovers, husbands and fathers, men are being portrayed here as potential rapists, misogynists, mercenaries and paedophiles. It is no surprise that some see the ecological situation as a part of the same set of issues with feminism:<sup>51</sup> a matter of common degradation. Schüssler-Fiorenza observes the wider point that "liberation theologians of all colours have insisted on the oppression of peoples due to racism, sexism, class exploitation, homophobia, militarism, and colonialism as the practical and ideological condition of nuclear mentality."<sup>52</sup> The implied separation of divinity, humanity and nature has had revolutionary consequences for the whole eco-system in making permissible the 'subduing' of nature by 'man', and holding 'nature' outside of the realm of the sacred.

Seventeenth century science was revolutionary not just in methods and concepts, but also in the way it became embedded within culture and consciousness. Two critical developments in the social location of science took place.<sup>53</sup> The first was the founding of societies in Western Europe specifically for science; there was patronage of course, but also a certain autonomy, which resulted in some

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<sup>51</sup> For example, Rosemary Radford-Ruether argues that oppression of nature is part of a culture: nature dualism that is itself an integral part of a set of inter-related dualisms, and determined by an over-arching male: female dichotomy. Hence relations between men and women are the ground of culture: nature dualism and thus the oppression both of women and of nature runs parallel. New Woman, New Earth, (NY: Seabury Press, 1975). See also Radford-Ruether's Gaia and God (London: SCM, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Commitment and Critical Inquiry," Harvard Theological Review 82/1 (1989): 1-11. See also Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution, (San Francisco: 1980).

<sup>53</sup> See Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, (eds) Revolution in History, *op. cit.* 305f.



independent public presence. The motto of The Royal Society - *Nullius in Verba*, (On the word of no man) - emphasises the insistence on the centrality of empirical verifiability. The second was scientific publishing which gave rise to a social community of science. The 'scientific establishment' was a part of Christian culture, and so again Christianity can be seen as fulfilling a legitimating function for scientific activities, and indeed for activities with a marked ideological, coercive component. Those who opposed scientific developments were characterised as 'sophisters' of various types:<sup>54</sup> occultists, Freemasons - certainly impious and deeply anti-Christian - that is, distinctly socially unacceptable. These developments in the social location of a powerful establishment have proved to be profoundly significant, for they combined to form a most resilient and robust power base - a fundament of civil society.

The ecological consequences of these developments should not be underestimated, precisely because this establishment enshrined and 'traditioned' on the values of the new science. Descartes bequeathed the method - the dualism of mind and body - while Bacon prescribed through a battery of metaphors both the theory and the practice. It is "easier to see ... (what went wrong) if we notice the way in which the pioneers of mechanism went about reshaping the concept of Nature."<sup>55</sup>

It has been the intention of this historical excursion so far to undergird three particular points. First, the ecological crisis has been a consequence of the loss of the sense of the sacred in nature, re-configured as object to function in a mechanical way for the benefit of humanity: the non-human creation merely the stage and scenery for human actors in a world where to live in God's sight was determined by the possession of faculties of reason. Second, that this mind-set was established by the seventeenth century revolution in scientific methodology, which designated empirical verifiability through observation and experiment as the only means to know. Facts became separated from values, truth was associated with facts, from which no values could be derived: the fallacy of Locke's Naturalistic Fallacy, which holds that factual statements about the world do not furnish the ground for values, and hence prescription cannot be derived from description. That the concept of truth straddles both the world of facts and the world of values was not considered; that factual truth is a very unimportant

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<sup>54</sup> The Jacobins were construed as 'Sophisters' in three types: *of Impiety, of Rebellion and of Anarchy*. Most had interests in the occult, many were Freemasons; all were understood as deeply anti-Christian. See Abbé Augustin Barruel, *Preliminary Discourse*, vol. 1 cited in *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1798), Merryn Williams (ed.) *Revolutions: 1775-1830*, (London: Penguin, 1977), 30.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation*, *op. cit.* 76.



form of truth compared to the truths by which we live was not part of the values of the ruling intellectual force that was heir to the new method.

Third, that the ecological crisis of late modern times must be seen as an aspect within the broader 'secularity crisis,' and that Christianity has served to legitimate these developments, and therefore, albeit unwittingly, has colluded with them. Legitimation can be both idolatrous and ideological, and in this context Christianity has functioned as a religion of society; that is, it acquiesced in the vested interests of particular power groups. Such an ideology is "the powerful distortion ...(in which) the claims of a class and institution are identified with the truth of God."<sup>56</sup> The God of ideology functions as an idol: a concept of God that has been construed by persons for their own purposes - a 'man-made' God who can be pushed around to suit and serve particular interests.

God was pushed into the distance by seventeenth century science, by those who understood themselves to be Christian. "The great thinkers of that time took it for granted ...(that) to study ... (Nature) was simply one of the many ways to celebrate ... (God's) glory. "<sup>57</sup> Bacon advocated the diligent study both of nature and of Christianity: for him the one did not compromise the other.<sup>58</sup> Descartes was certain he possessed the idea of God; but for Kant, we can claim knowledge only of what we have found out personally and appropriated.<sup>59</sup>

Kant was devotional in a practical sense, but he brought belief in God to the bar of reason and found it wanting. We could not 'know' via divine revelation, for knowledge had to be evidenced empirically through objective observation. For Kant, God was a 'thing-in-itself', the object neither of proof nor or disproof: neither ruled out nor ruled in, God transcends the realm of demonstration. Thus despite Kant's interest in theism, his rejection of God as the proper object of theoretical enquiry marked the final parting of the ways between morality and scientific research.<sup>60</sup> God's function was then to be invoked on behalf of our

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<sup>56</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989). The context of Brueggeman's discussion is a critique of the Israelite cult by the Prophets. As he makes clear, they are not calling sacrificial practices *per se* into question. Rather the prophets are concerned with "dangerous... liturgies of praise. Liturgy becomes domesticated and praise of God becomes endorsement of the way the world is presently arranged.... Their critique of cult is in fact a critique of ideology..." 111.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Midgley, Science as Salvation, *op. cit.* 1.

<sup>58</sup> Robert M Young, "The Impact of Darwin on Conventional Thought" in Antony Symondson (ed.), The Victorian Crisis of Faith (London: SPCK, 1974) 24.

<sup>59</sup> Iris Murdoch, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (London: Penguin, 1993) 434f.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* 440.



practical reason as an aid to understanding the unity of nature, in which humanity remains separate from nature, free as opposed to determined.

The confident Diderot and his fellow *encyclopaedistes* of the Enlightenment insisted that all knowledge could be known eventually to 'man' and thereafter God would be called upon only to explain what had yet to be explained by science: another idol was born - the God of the Gaps. Paley delighted in natural science as biology that revealed God's wisdom; but his deistic God pales beside the Judaeo-Christian God who creates, sustains and redeems, and this deistic model of God was one who certainly would not interfere with the business of human endeavours to know. The Romantic reaction to Enlightenment rationalism gave rise to yet another idolatrous model of God. While rightly rejecting deism, Schleiermacher's private God of subjective experience could never stand over against, or call into question, human claims to objective knowledge. The point is here that Christianity accommodated itself to society, by being hospitable to concepts of God shaped by (non-theological) scientific and philosophical discourses. Hence the nineteenth century decline in trinitarian doctrine, with Schleiermacher - the paradigm example - confining the Trinity to the appendix of The Christian Faith<sup>61</sup> and simultaneously offering a restricted notion of divine agency and active providence. His account of 'nature's original immutable course'<sup>62</sup> leaves no room for particular divine acts within and towards the world.

With this accommodation to society Christianity connived with the forces of secularisation. This can be exemplified by the way Darwinian theory was received within culture.<sup>63</sup> Darwin effected a paradigm shift by rooting humankind *in* nature as opposed to outside or above it. But despite uniting humanity with nature and rendering human beings natural, this did not mean good news for non-human nature, nor indeed for (most) human beings. For it accelerated a trend starting back from seventeenth century science in which mechanised science provided an analogy for a mechanised society, and this had the effect of justifying cruel treatment of the poor and marginalized in society who were treated no better than animals.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith 1830, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* 179.

<sup>63</sup> Robert M Young 'Darwin', *op. cit.* 44.

<sup>64</sup> Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World, *op. cit.* 42.



Darwin was very much a part of the political establishment, inside the thought-world of his culture and class.<sup>65</sup> Darwinian evolutionary theory tends to be presented in terms of a challenge to theology: the start of the so-called science versus religion debate. Certainly there were many popular controversies, but what mattered historically is what happened among the elite. Pure science and pure theology were not the central issues and the popular view of polarisation is false. Christian doctrines were not actually at stake and there should not have been any major difficulty for Christians to accept Darwinian theory.<sup>66</sup>

Darwin's theory, and his originality, is actually an amalgam of a number of ideas which come from traditions which seem on the surface to be opposed to science. Darwin's mentors - Paley, Malthus and Lyell - were members of the theological establishment; and it is clear that Darwin's supporters - Frederick Temple, Sir John Lubbock, twenty members of Parliament and a future Prime Minister - were members of the political elite. Darwin's theory embodies contemporary theistic views,<sup>67</sup> and his intentions were not anti-theistic or anti-religious at all. His framework of ideas was influenced strongly by Paley's reasoning about the harmony in nature, Lyell's time scale, and Malthus' mechanics. Indeed, Darwin showed more awareness and concern than did his successors for the theological and moral ambiguities disclosed by his observations.<sup>68</sup> When Marx wrote to Darwin to ask if he could dedicate the English edition of Das Kapital to him, Darwin refused, saying he did not wish to be associated with attacks on Christianity and theism.<sup>69</sup> On the contrary, he was "explicitly arguing for a grander view of the Creator...[T]he problem was not whether or not God governed the universe, but how."<sup>70</sup>

It must nevertheless be conceded that while Darwin may have been 'arguing for a grander view of the Creator' the thrust of his theory is pantheistic. In a way comparable to Schleiermacher's model, divine agency has been limited to disallow active providence within and towards the world. Nature is here replacing God;

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<sup>65</sup> Robert M Young 'Darwin', *op. cit.* 44.

<sup>66</sup> There were two main strands of opposition: first, some opponents of Darwin were concerned about appropriation of the theory to support racist supremacist ideology; and second, Darwin's opponents were not evangelicals as has been thought, but were strict literal fundamentalists. David Livingstone, 'The Idea of Design: The Vicissitudes of a Key Response in the Princeton Response to Darwin', Scottish Journal of Theology 37, (1984), pp 329-57. See also James Moore, The Post-Darwinian Controversies. A Study of the Protestant Struggle to come to terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870-1900 (Cambridge: CUP, 1979).

<sup>67</sup> Robert M Young 'Darwin', *op. cit.* 44.

<sup>68</sup> Colin Gunton, The Triune Creator (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998) 88.

<sup>69</sup> Robert M Young, "The Impact of Darwin on Conventional Thought", *op. cit.* 31.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* 25.



nature becomes the agent and has power. Theologically, this is ultimately 'the real threat of Darwinism':

... as an all-encompassing dogma ... it is an alternative to the doctrine of providence. It is ... a catapulting of the God of deism into time. Previously understood as to make a mechanism and leave it to itself, the shadowy God of modern rationalism disappears further into the background as attention is called away from his action in the beginning not to his providential activity in the present, but to worldly happenings which displace or replace that activity.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, instinctive cruelties to non-human life and also to the so-called 'lower classes' of human beings can be seen merely as consequences of the general law, along with its concomitant socio-political effects: the inheritance of property and the replacement of the so-called 'lower races' by the higher. These were the ideas of the contemporary ruling intellectual elite. That is, the ideas of a power group that included politicians, scientists and indeed, also theologians. "Many of these people were both Doctors of Divinity and Fellows of the Royal Society...trying to reconcile their Genesis with their geology."<sup>72</sup> In hindsight, this elite group has formed an unholy alliance: both an idolatry and an ideology which has played no small part in generating the conditions for the ecological crisis, as well as furthering secularised cultural values which hold sway in the modern world. Has not Christianity's practice of legitimation been, in some measure, the handmaiden of secularisation? But theoretical Darwinian science - which was pantheistic rather than atheistic - displaced God rather than finally replacing God.

The ideological myth of the triumph of science over religion was socially rather than intellectually established, via the influential English periodicals which were controlled by atheists and agnostics: wealthy business men with merchant interests.<sup>73</sup> While there were moral and logical arguments, Victorian religion lost more credibility through editorial policy than through decisive debate. The efficacy of the power of print as a revolutionary agent of cultural change is well known throughout history, from Luther onwards.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* *op. cit.* 186.

<sup>72</sup> Robert M Young, "The Impact of Darwin on Conventional Thought", *op. cit.* 24.

<sup>73</sup> Susan Budd, *Sociologists and Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1973) 143.

<sup>74</sup> Elisabeth Eisenstein, 'On Revolution and the Printed Word', in Roy Porter and Miklas Teich, (eds), *Revolution in History* *op. cit.* 186-205.



Our global crises - the environment, the injustice and inequalities of rampant capitalism - are in many respects the product of what became the new secular order: interest groups in science, politics, business allied to the traditional establishment. For the values that operate in science are not simply connected to those in the wider society; instead it is the values of powerful interest groups in society, the patrons along with their agents, that determine the issues and the agenda for scientific research. "What gets done is what the patrons pay for.... Like scientists, science is not separate from values or above them; it is their embodiment. This is as true of the theories, and the therapies and the things of science, medicine and technology as it is of industrial processes and commercial products."<sup>75</sup>

In this secular view of things, God is not required to be invoked as legitimation for now "scientific truths are statements that have been publicly accepted by the experts."<sup>76</sup> Or God might be invoked metaphorically: Steven Hawking does not believe in God but believes we can come to know the mind of God.<sup>77</sup> Or perhaps God has been re-created in our image: enlightenment style self-confidence has, in some cases, reached alarming proportions: "Truly we should be lords of the universe."<sup>78</sup>

The secular world has displaced and re-placed God: "the Creator has absolutely no job to do (and) can be allowed to evaporate and disappear from the scene." <sup>79</sup> It should be borne in mind, however, that those who have made Darwinism into "an ideology of the escalator"<sup>80</sup> have strayed far from Darwin himself, for whom evolution was more like a many-branched multi-directional tree rather than an ascending hierarchical series. "Deism represents a kind of cosmic toryism: what is, is right; and in that respect Darwinism as represented by such triumphalists as Richard Dawkins and Peter Atkins is a form of modern rationalist deism."<sup>81</sup>

It might be said with some justification that Christianity over many centuries and with the status of official religion, has contributed historically to further the causes

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<sup>75</sup> Robert M Young, 'Darwin' *op. cit.* 52ff.

<sup>76</sup> The scientist John Ziman, in The Listener, 18 Aug. 1960.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Hawking, A Brief History of Time, (London: Bantam, 1996). Hawking has, however, now abandoned his search for a Theory of Everything: "I'm glad that our search for understanding will never come to an end, and that we will always have the challenge of new discovery. Without it, we would stagnate." Church Times, 12 March 2004, p 9.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Davies, Superforce: The Search for a Grand, Unified Theory of Nature (Unwin, 1984) 168.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Atkins, The Creation (Oxford: W H Freeman, 1987) 17.

<sup>80</sup> Colin Gunton, The Triune Creator *op. cit.* 188.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*



of particular coercive power groups. That is, it has functioned as a religion of society. In concluding that the relationship that Christianity has with the ecological situation is one of legitimation, one of functioning idolatrously, it has also to be conceded that in so doing, Christianity has undermined itself through both privatising its practices and reducing its own resources. Perhaps the single most important move in raging against the dying of the light is to rage against the reductionist account of what it means to be a human being in this world. This will entail a rejection of dysfunctional understandings of the place of humanity in God's good creation: the false ontological status that raises human beings out of the created order and which both inhibits our self-understanding as creatures and also denies the construal of Christian notions such as grace and redemption in ways that establish any commonality of focus within which the goods of the human and the non-human might be considered together.

Being *in imago Dei* and given 'dominion' in creation places humankind in a particular relationship with God's non-human creatures. But this is not a relationship of absolute differentiation, and it must be taken alongside ways of understanding that the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it: that is, human and non-human beings participate in forms of creatureliness, each called to fulfil God's purposes and each with a good-of-its-own. Being *in imago Dei* enables human beings to recognise and respect the sacredness of all of God's living things. It has been our failure to recognise this which is a measure of the extent to which humanity falls short of the ideal presented to us in creation. It falls short also in our failure to respond to the dominion that God conferred on those he made in his image: that is, to dominion understood rightly as "a calling to be and to act in such a way as to enable the created order to be itself as a response of praise to its maker."<sup>82</sup> Historically, this failure to meet the ideal - this missing the mark - has been the sin of the Christian tradition that calls for repentance.

While any response to the ecological crisis may be at the least an ethical imperative - for surely Christian faithfulness demands action be taken - it is also a response to the broader context of secularisation and Christianity's relationship with the wider 'secularity crisis' of which the ecological situation should be seen to be a part. As Lyon says, today's "ecological, political, nuclear and life dilemmas cry out for wisdom from beyond the merely temporal horizon."<sup>83</sup> But the theological credentials of certain forms of ecological theology could arguably be

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* 12.

<sup>83</sup> David Lyon, *Beyond the Steeple's Shadow*, *op. cit.* 151.

questioned. For some tend not to offer any christology, finding the particularities of the life and death of Christ unhelpful or embarrassing, or, more generally, avoid constructive doctrinal discussion at all. There is a range of exceptions here,<sup>84</sup> but many theologians who seek to address the ecological situation seem to have priorities other than attempting to re-articulate christological doctrine or otherwise affirming Christian norms and tradition.

Much ecological theology is constructed by theologians who speak from, and draw eclectically on, a variety of traditions, but who share a common concern. They express concern not only for peace and justice for all people, but also for 'right relationships' with all creation. "The consensus is that an anthropocentric ethic, understood as an emphasis on human well being at the expense of the earth and other living beings, must be replaced by an ethic of respect for life and the environment."<sup>85</sup> They are impelled by the urgency required to address the various ecological problems the world faces. They perceive God's presence in the suffering of the oppressed and in the injury and exploitation of the earth's resources; for these theologians, the harm wrought by selfish geo-political economics to any living thing, human, animal or vegetable, is essentially part of a single issue.

Therefore much of this ecotheology is primarily aimed at expressing ways of conferring intrinsic value on all living things, and of assigning the status of subject to the whole of creation. It is often influenced by Process thought, which incorporates the idea of the natural world in process of becoming, with an emphasis on organicism. God in his 'primordial nature' provides aims and ideals and is thus the fund of universals, while in his 'consequent nature', he is Responsive Love, changing in response to occurrences. There is also influence from the Gaian perspective of the inter-connectedness of all living creation, a notion to which ecological theology can appeal in the need to affirm the material. Its sources are eclectic, its intentions rather ecumenical in character. Scant

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<sup>84</sup> For example, Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation (London: SCM, 1985); The Way of Jesus Christ, (London: SCM, 1990); his later major doctrinal statements, or 'contributions to theology' as he calls them, do not focus so specifically on ecological matters but ecological themes remain present: The Spirit of Life, (London: SCM, 1992); The Coming of God, (London: SCM, 1996). Paul Santmire, The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), and also Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000); Peter Scott, A Political Theology of Nature, (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Stephen Clark, How to think about the Earth: Philosophical and theological models for ecology, (London: Mowbray, 1993); also Animals and their Moral Standing, (London: Routledge, 1997) which is, though, ethics oriented, as is the work of Andrew Linzey, e.g., Animal Theology, (London: SCM, 1994); Christianity and the Rights of Animals, (London: SPCK, 1987); Michael Northcott The Environment and Christian Ethics (Cambridge: CUP, 1996)

<sup>85</sup> Charles Birch, William Eakin, Jay McDaniel (eds.) Liberating Life *op. cit.* 1



attention is paid to Christian particulars, more specifically, the person and work of Christ.

The reasons for this are various and essentially shape the premisses of ecological theology's discourse. In the first place, there is generally a root-and-branch acceptance of Lynn White's critique of Christianity; for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether writes that "it has been recognised that the ecological crisis...has a theological basis...the Judaeo-Christian tradition favoured a theory of subordination of nature and man's domination over it."<sup>86</sup> Her prime concern is with the male:female dualism on which the mind:body and culture:nature dualisms are premised, and which give rise both to anthropocentrism, the declared arch-enemy of the ecologically committed, and also to a stress on the spiritual to the negation of the material. Habitually dualistic thinking has given rise to a theology of creation that understands God as pure spirit quite distinct from the material universe:<sup>87</sup> an active God exerting all power over and against passive matter. As Grace Jantzen describes it, "God is all knowing; matter is mindless, irrational. God is goodness itself; matter in itself is without value, mere stuff."<sup>88</sup>

Jantzen joins Ruether in agreeing that this relationship of domination is analogous to, and reinscribed by a dualism of mind as positive in character - divinely rational - and body as negative with its needs and impulses, particularly in the realm of sexuality. Male:female dualism has traditionally associated maleness with mind, and hence rationality and God, while femaleness is identified with body, and thus with earthly matter and sexual desire that both need and invite control.

This male:female dualism identifies women strongly with the material, the earth. The male principle of rationality and mastery, by contrast, is identified with the technological dominance of

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<sup>86</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism (London: SCM, 1981) 59.

<sup>87</sup> Bronislaw Szerszynski argues that claims about necessarily negative consequences are flawed. For him, dualisms can be used to downplay as well as reinforce other dualisms, and hence any "unified oppressive conceptual framework is overstated". He argues also that a flight from metaphysical dualisms tends towards a retreat into "a self-defeating cultural dualism", and that there is no necessary relation between non-dualistic thinking and environmentalistic thought: indeed he considers that in "some sense the objectification of nature...is a prerequisite for regarding it as a possible object of moral concern." "A Critique of Ecotheological Antidualism," Studies in Christian Ethics 6/2 (1993): 67-78.

<sup>88</sup> Grace Jantzen, "Editorial: Who Needs Feminism?" Theology 93 (1990): 340-1.

nature. Just as men by their rationality master their bodies, feelings and women, so technology is the rational mastery of nature by males.<sup>89</sup>

Against the background of this thinking, a theology focusing on a (male) person, both human and divine, is rejected as an unhelpful option: "[T]his personal saviour orientation has led to an interpersonal devotionism that quite easily dispenses with earth except as a convenient support for life."<sup>90</sup> Allied to this, much ecological theology wishes to avoid any perceived exclusivism.<sup>91</sup> It seeks to address a truly multi-cultural, all-pervasive problem, directly and with urgency. Not surprisingly perhaps, it has therefore a pluralist thrust: "[W]e cannot develop our life-centred ethics and our life-centred understanding of God in isolation. Rather we must do so in dialogue with other faiths."<sup>92</sup> McDaniel asserts further that Eastern religions are more resourceful for ecological sensitivity than are Judaism, Christianity or Islam, and specifically he finds that Buddhism yields valuable insights. The emphasis on relationality and interconnectedness in Zen Buddhism enables a clear understanding of the self from which develops a sympathy and identity with all other forms of life. Certainly, the Dalai Lama is helpful in his exposition of compassion as

The common connective tissue of the body of human life....Without it children would not be nurtured and protected, the slightest conflicts would never be resolved, people probably would not have even learned to talk to one another. Nothing pleasant that we enjoy throughout our lives would come to us without the kindness and compassion of others. So it does not seem unrealistic to me: compassion seems to be the greatest power.<sup>93</sup>

But despite the quality of this message, it might be noted also that this teaching is quite human-centred rather than oriented towards God-ordained loving praxis.

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth", in *Liberating Life*, *op. cit.* 152.

<sup>91</sup> Much ecotheology aims to be broadly ecumenical in character. For example, David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religious Ecological Spirituality in Cross Cultural Perspective*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995); Stephanie Kaza, "Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism and the Environmental Crisis," *Ecotheology* 1 (1996): 71-98.

<sup>92</sup> Jay McDaniel, "Revisioning God and the Self: Lessons from Buddhism", *Liberating Life*, *op. cit.* 228. Cf. Ian Harris, "How Environmentalist is Buddhism?" *Religion* 21/2 (1991) 101-14.

<sup>93</sup> H. H. the Dalai Lama, "Tissue of Compassion," *Cathedral* 5/1 (1989): 5, cited by Larry Rasmussen, "Returning to our Senses: The Theology of the Cross as a Theology for Eco-Justice", in *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology* ed. Dieter Hessel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 48.



Furthermore, as an ethic it is essentially utilitarian in character, not necessarily wrong in itself, but scarcely a grounding for any theological claim. And as Ian Harris<sup>94</sup> indicates, Buddhist concern tends to be directed towards an escape from the physical world, rather than the protection of it. It is neither clear nor persuasive therefore, that our authentic selfhood is enabled more effectively by these means than by obedience to the divine command of love of God and neighbour (where this is adequately understood). Indeed, while Buddhism undoubtedly has its own account or theology of nature, its ideas would find their coherence within the broader Buddhist cultural scheme. Ideas cannot be simply exported from one belief system and imported into another without considerable risk of misinterpretation: that is, it is the context that renders intelligibility. "Buddhist *ahimsa* ... only appears like pure liberal goodwill when wrested from its own ecology of cultural ideas."<sup>95</sup>

Thomas Berry<sup>96</sup> chooses also to affirm the positive potential of Eastern influences. For him, the Chinese observe a law of compassion whereby the human heart cannot bear to see others suffer. This seems a rather romanticised view that surely would be difficult to reconcile with reports from China of the fate of the many unwanted baby girls that are abandoned and left to die in situations of suffering.<sup>97</sup> He urges the need to develop a spiritual dimension in which we move beyond divine-human communion and embrace also the earth; he cites the Sioux Sun Dance ceremony as appropriate witness to this. However such mythology of the ecological 'noble savage' has been much undermined.<sup>98</sup>

Bronislaw Szerszynski understands the way that non-Western religions are represented in ecological discourses of the 'exotic' as the 'saving Other'. Developing Edward Said's idea of non-European traditions as the 'repressed contents of the European unconscious', the 'Other' against which Europe defined itself, Szerszynski's account finds 'Native North Americans, Ancient Pagan

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<sup>94</sup> Ian Harris, "How Environmentalist is Buddhism?" *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Bronislaw Szerszynski, "A Critique of Ecotheological Antidualism," *op. cit.* n10.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth", *op. cit.*

<sup>97</sup> Another example of culturally specific callousness that springs to mind and is impossible to reconcile with an ethic of compassion is the practice of making chickens run round on hot coals to burn their feet: the resulting blisters are considered a great culinary delicacy.

<sup>98</sup> See Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, (St Ives: TSP, 1997) 211ff. Ridley cites the 'famous speech' given by Chief Seattle, leader of the Duwamish Indians, to the governor of Washington territory in 1854, a 'long and shaming speech that is now among the most widely quoted texts in all environmental literature': "How can you buy or sell the sky? The land?...Every part of this earth is sacred to my people...All are holy..." Ridley points out that this "entire 'speech' is a work of modern fiction...written for a TV drama..." See also René Dubos, *The Wooing of the Earth*, (London: Athlone, 1980.)

Greeks, Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists' returning in ecotheology "to play a saving role...all of these were ecologists all along, it would appear."<sup>99</sup> Surely rightly, Szerszynski points to the incoherence of such notions, citing, for Native Americans and Pagan Greeks, fear of supernatural reprisal as an equally likely motive for caring attention to nature as worship or reverence for it; and observes also, that anthropologically, the 'relation between religion and ecological sustainability has proved to be far less neat ... and rarely to have been mediated by an ethical respect for the non-human.'

Nevertheless, given this pluralist thrust, these ecological theologians have no real interest in a divine-human saviour, and so the person and the work of Christ tend to be left in the background. Maybe Christ is appropriated and re-presented, for example, by Jay McDaniel as a "departed ancestor who now resides in a mysterious spirit world, uniquely close to God",<sup>100</sup> or ignored altogether. Essentially they have moved to an extraction of the ethics of Christianity which may have variably, some basis in scripture and tradition, but which is aimed largely at legitimating intrinsic value for all creation. They tend not to engage fully with the doctrines of Christ, or of God; and if they do refer to them, it might be with another purpose in view. For example, Birch cites Hartshorne on the cross and incarnation, but it is a preamble to extending the notion of incarnation to all creation which "together with the symbol of the cross, becomes central in the ecological understanding of nature."<sup>101</sup> So here the centrality of Christ is replaced by the centrality of all created matter: a move that raises critical questions, not least whether this is actually theology at all. Apart from acute methodological difficulties and questionable premisses, it neglects surely to affirm the material in the most distinctive and theologically satisfactory way, which is to affirm this christologically.

Indeed in its attempt positively to affirm matter, and construe all created things as the locus of value, ecological theology can run close to idolatry; "...sometimes as if it were the creation and not the creator that we worship",<sup>102</sup> a tendency to pantheism with its 'pagan and dehumanising effects.' For Christian theology, nature is good but not divine, and can be understood as personalised in the risen

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<sup>99</sup> Bronislaw Szerszynski, "A Critique of Ecotheological Antidualism," *op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> Jay McDaniel, "Communion with Spirits and Ancestors", in *Ecotheology* 1 (1996) *op. cit.* 9-34.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Birch, "Chance, Purpose and the Order of Nature", in *Liberating Life*, *op. cit.* 198. Also Sallie McFague: "A Christian nature spirituality...extends the paradigm of the radical destabilising love we see in Jesus' parables, healing stories, and eating practices *to nature*," *Super. Natural Christians* (London: SCM, 1997) 14.

<sup>102</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1992) 32.



Lord. It is christology that rightly affirms theologically the material basis of life, and accepts matter as the vehicle and instrument of Spirit. Christological doctrine enables a distinctive grounding for affirming the material: "...the Christian revelation affirms that... this stuff of the cosmos is so fundamental that God expressed his being in, and acted through...Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>103</sup>

For Fox, the heart of the problem with Christianity lies in its tradition of the doctrine of original sin, and the way Fall-Redemption theology has shaped Western culture. He writes:

I believe that an exaggerated doctrine of original sin, one that is employed as a starting point for spirituality, plays kindly into the hands of empire-builders, slave masters and patriarchal society in general. It divides and thereby conquers, pitting one's thoughts against one's feelings, one's body against one's personal needs, people against earth, animals and nature in general. By doing this, it so convolutes people, so confuses and preoccupies them, that deeper questions about community, justice and celebration never come to the fore.<sup>104</sup>

Fox's *bête noir* is, of course, Augustine, for bringing residues of Neo-platonist metaphysics into his Christian theologising: an other-worldly, spiritualising eschatology and philosophical dualisms with their negative effects both for women and nature. Without doubt, particular statements can be isolated in Augustine to support these kinds of conclusions; it is true that his interest in interiority shifted the theological focus of the tradition away from creation. But Augustine's view of the material creation is arguably more nuanced than Fox allows for. Augustine may have been influenced to some extent by the negative aspects of Neo-Platonism but he was also aware of the need to modify these in the light of incarnational and creational theology, and his own commentaries on Genesis demonstrate a consistent interest in the created order. When Augustine says that everything has been made for human use, what is entailed here is that with regard to everything except God, we must use our rational judgement to assess its value and our proper use of it by referring it to God.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, the sexist dualism and culture/nature dualism 'traditioned' on by the philosophical dualism present in Augustinian thought is clearly present throughout history.

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<sup>103</sup> Arthur Peacocke, in *Man and Nature* ed. Hugh Montefiore, (London: Collins, 1975) 142.

<sup>104</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1983) 54.

<sup>105</sup> Margaret Atkins, "Flawed Beauty and Wise Use," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 7/1 (1994): 1-16.



The point here, however, is how Fox wishes to 'remedy' this tradition of false and unhelpful theologising. He seeks to replace this (allegedly) pernicious Fall-Redemption theology with a theology of original blessing and a theology of the coming cosmic Christ. But this coming of the cosmic Christ involves his return to the era of the garden, before the Fall. But Fox is not here offering a rich account of the person and work of Christ. Instead, he offers a rather romanticised exemplary type. He writes: "[W]hat is needed is ... a spiritual vision that prays, celebrates, and lives out the reality of the Cosmic Christ who lives and breathes in Jesus and in God's children, in all the prophets of religion everywhere, in all the creatures of the universe."<sup>106</sup> Jesus is understood primarily as a shaman figure who is "an awakener to the sacrament of the cosmos"<sup>107</sup> and whose role in the Eucharist is "[L]ike wisdom, the perfect hostess (Prov. 9.1,2), he reveals in a banquet context the mysteries of our origin and of God."<sup>108</sup> The historical Jesus remains for us "a model and a teacher of letting go."<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the historical Jesus reveals not only the Cosmic Christ but, as we follow him, our own divinity is disclosed to us; that is, Jesus' divinity is the type of our own divinity, and as we awake to this, we are transformed to a new life of enchanted existence, which is our salvation.<sup>110</sup> This is a classic revelationist and exemplarist account of atonement. However, when Fox suggests "falling in love with a galaxy"<sup>111</sup> as entailed in our new enchanted existence, it does beg questions about the practical outworkings of this kind of theologising<sup>112</sup> as well as the basic methodological adequacy *per se* of this theology.

With the exception of Fox, much of the previous kind of ecotheology is essentially ethics; indeed most of its exponents state repeatedly that their objective is to formulate an eco-centric ethic. But ethics deals essentially with values and related praxis, and as such, is functional in character; systematic theology considers meanings, concepts, narratives and ideology and presents constructive doctrinal proposals which remain open for testing and re-evaluation. While ethics and theology are clearly not unrelated, this kind of ethical 'ecotheologising' does not engage with the significance of Christ in and for the world, and as such has no

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<sup>106</sup> Matthew Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 7.

<sup>107</sup> Matthew Fox, Original Blessing *op. cit.* 239.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* 123.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.* 169.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.* 235.

<sup>111</sup> Matthew Fox, Creation Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991) 19.

<sup>112</sup> For a full discussion, see Paul Santmire, Nature Reborn, *op. cit.* 20ff. Santmire considers that Fox's work resonates in the main with an elite, affluent few who can afford to be anti-urban, romanticist and individualistic.



real or strong claim to be named 'theology'. Furthermore, given the utilitarian thrust of some of this theorising, as ethics it is scarcely Christian in character. As Bishop Butler suggested, even if God were a utilitarian, he has made our nature such that we must not be: "And ...were the Author of Nature to propose nothing to himself as an end but the production of happiness, were his moral character merely that of benevolence; yet ours is not so."<sup>113</sup>

Even some ecotheology that has a more persuasive claim to be defined as (a kind of) theology - given its stronger affirmation of prime theological sources as normative - has also a rather uncomfortable utilitarian stress. For example, Larry Rasmussen's Earth Community, Earth Ethics, despite offering an account of the Cross, has also an orientation to sustainability: "[A] world within to match the world without is a requirement of sustainability itself...Broadly speaking, what is untenable for sustainability is a moral universe that circles human creatures only and does not regard other creatures and earth as a whole as imposing moral claims we need worry over."<sup>114</sup>

And Oelschlaeger's scripturally-oriented Caring for Creation, has a distinctly secular political focus and asks, "[C]an religion make a difference in the context of our liberal-democratic state?"<sup>115</sup> And later affirms that "[C]aring for creation, whatever its metaphysical implications, can be a politically effective metaphor, because it cuts across the continuum of religious belief..."<sup>116</sup> In fact it seems likely that Oelschlaeger is jumping on the bandwagon where, according to Annette Baier, "[C]are is the new buzzword,' leavening the 'cold jealous virtue of justice' with a supplement of 'warmer, more communitarian virtues and social ideals."<sup>117</sup> Oelschlaeger seems to be extending this concept beyond the frame of debate around purely human ethical concerns to embrace the ecological agenda. And the political thrust of his work suggests also that, despite ostensible Christian credentials, the categories of justice and care are grounded in Lockean liberal social values rather than biblical concepts of justice and righteousness.

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<sup>113</sup> Bishop J Butler, Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel ed. T A Roberts, (London: SPCK, 1970) 152.

<sup>114</sup> Larry Rasmussen, Earth Community, Earth Ethics, *op. cit.* 344.

<sup>115</sup> Max Oelschlaeger, Caring for Creation: an ecumenical approach to the environmental crisis (NY: Yale, 1994) 118.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* 219.

<sup>117</sup> Annette Baier, Moral Prejudices: essays on ethics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 19. Baier discusses how, following the influence of Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) a large philosophical counterculture is stressing that an ethic of care is required to deliver justice as a social value; for a justice-oriented ethic alone is incapable of actually delivering justice. See Baier's essay, 'The Need for More than Justice.' *op. cit.*



A Christian ethical understanding of personhood construes persons in relation to each other as well as to all living creatures, for the whole biotic community is variously a part of God's good creation, and is in continual process of becoming what God wills it, in its diversity, to be. "Whatever is, is kept in being by God's creative goodness and power."<sup>118</sup> Rudman considers that this may be the reason why some Christians feel inclined to move beyond this not only to a position of conferring intrinsic value to all things, but in some cases further still to affirm a deep ecology view which accepts a 'fundamental unity (and equality?) of everything in earth's community of life'. This may indeed account for the volume of writing in this vein by those who understand themselves as working within a broadly Christian framework.

But Rudman warns rightly that this "is not a view...which Christians can contemplate lightly, since it conflicts with other basic cosmological beliefs and Christian understanding of God as Creator and Redeemer."<sup>119</sup> While theological doctrine remains always open to fresh insights yielded by God's self-revelation through culture and community, there must remain some continuity; doctrine should be creative but "the idea of radical discontinuity in doctrine is not strictly conceivable."<sup>120</sup> Theology must be relevant and distinctive and while this ecotheology is relevant in its concern with contemporary issues, it is stripped of that which renders the distinctiveness of Christianity: a focus on the particularity of Christ, a particularity that will deliver universal redemption.

To claim as a premiss that anthropocentrism is the major problem is itself questionable in its simplicity. God confers value, but since it is persons who recognise this value, eco-centrism is in essence epistemologically impossible. Martin-Soskice distinguishes two versions of anthropocentrism: the 'divine hamster cage' type and the 'divine regent' or 'divine servant' type.<sup>121</sup> In the divine hamster cage type, God is the hamster owner and humanity are the hamsters. God has created the world as a vivarium for us: the created order is our lettuce leaves and clean sawdust. Everything is available for us to dispose of; our cage is our environment. This is the negative form of anthropocentrism, and Martin-Soskice notes that it is for this reason we should speak of 'creation' rather than 'environment'. She favours the second form: the benign, positive form which is the

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<sup>118</sup> Stanley Rudman, Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) 330.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Maurice Wiles, cited John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (London: SCM, 1966) 20.

<sup>121</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, 'Creation and Relation' in Robin Gill (ed), Readings in Modern Theology (London: SPCK, 1995) 58-66.



divine regent or divine servant type, in which "human beings are integrally part of the whole created order but they have a privileged responsibility within it: rights are attended by responsibility. Women and men are made 'in the image of God' not to ravage God's creation but to attend to it, both by caring for it and by praising it."<sup>122</sup>

The theological task lies in the problem that is not so much anthropocentrism, rather it is "the tearing apart of creation and redemption, so that redemption comes to appear to consist in salvation out of and apart from the rest of the world."<sup>123</sup> Creation and redemption can be more readily held together via christological doctrine than through intrinsic value concepts. As Gunton puts it, "Jesus in some way or other is or represents the Kingdom of God, so that what he does is concerned... to establish ...the promised reign of God on earth."<sup>124</sup> Human redemption is bound irrevocably with the redemption of nature, and it is this binding together which is expressed in the incarnation: God joins himself to all creation. Christ "represents, and is, God-for-the-world, God involved in nature, God as part of his own creation."<sup>125</sup> Through resurrection, Christ is brought into a constitutive relation with all creation: it is his particularity that renders his universal salvific significance.

"All faithful Christian theology must be ... an interpretation of the scriptures.... A Christian theology must find its unity and coherence within that variety and diversity."<sup>126</sup> Gunton argues that the Gospels portray Christ as Lord of creation and hence christological discussion is framed by conceptions of his relation to the whole of creation. Any doctrine of creation therefore must give some expression to the centrality of Christ both as creator and mediator, for Christ is not only Lord of, but also part of, the created order. Some sense or interpretation must be made of the Genesis creation narratives, rather than a simple rejection of them: animals are to be viewed as companions (neighbours, therefore?) for human beings, for the text offers "no licence for the unbridled exploitation and subjugation of nature."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *ibid.* 64.

<sup>123</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, *op. cit.* 21. This separation of creation and redemption is a tendency that is largely a function of various efforts in Western theology to preserve the particularity of Jesus Christ as the Word of God against gnostic moves to disallow this particularity. These efforts have taken the form of distancing the *Logos hegemon* from the Logos incarnate, the one being associated with creation and the other with redemption. See Douglas Farrow, "St Irenaeus of Lyons: The Church and the World," *Pro Ecclesia* IV/3 (1995): 333-55.

<sup>124</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, *op. cit.* 17.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Faricy, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* London: SCM, 1982. 49.

<sup>126</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation* *op. cit.* 11ff.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Dallas: Word, 1987) 15.

There is no warrant, nor need, to construe non-human beings as persons<sup>128</sup> in order to understand them as creatures who have rights to kindness and just treatment, and as beings with their own ends and purposes as ordained by God. Rather there is every reason for ethical concern to embrace all creation and for the affirmation of relationality and mutuality between all God's creatures, human and non-human. Indeed there is much in scripture to justify this; the Bible as a whole witnesses to no redemption, nor social or personal life, apart from the creation, and the high value placed on the non-human creation is amply evidenced through a wealth of metaphors of nature. Jesus is portrayed in the synagogue reading from Isaiah 61, with its discussion of God's salvific acts in terms of metaphors of God's creativity, his planting of trees of righteousness. We may infer that "doctrines of creation are central to the outworking of other doctrines."<sup>129</sup>

And the doctrine of atonement is, as stated previously, central to the theological task and a fundamental and necessary discussion within any doctrinal proposal. While much ecological 'theology' has divorced itself from central aspects of the tradition, scripture and tradition remain normative in theology: it is these that render Christianity's distinctiveness. Christian metaphysics holds far richer possibilities for the development of constructive proposals through which to reflect critically on contemporary cultural concerns, including the ecological situation, than does ecotheology that has cast itself variously adrift from its moorings.

As well as holding in tension the poles of relevance and distinctiveness, it is in the theological task to maintain a creative tension between the actual and the potential: what theology actually is or has been, along with what it might be, or should be. It must be conceded that Christian theology has in the past failed to recognise the non-human creation within the embrace of its doctrinal proposals: understanding redemption apart from creation has resulted in accounts of atonement concerned only with the individual human person as a moral isolate. "The unhappy ambiguity of Christian tradition on the issue is a matter for regret, but not something that should prevent us from recognising the fundamental error in thinking of non-human animals as merely a resource for humans."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Bronislaw Szerszynski is persuasive in his criticism of what he calls 'identitarian' ethics with its implication that we only care for something or someone if we regard it or them as like ourselves: an impoverished notion that diminishes 'otherness' and does not allow things to be. "A Critique of Ecotheological Antidualism," *op. cit.*

<sup>129</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, *op. cit.* 23.

<sup>130</sup>Stanley Rudman, *Concepts of Person* *op. cit.* 331.



Theology is a constructive enterprise, its movement seeking to relate aspects of present circumstances to an interpretation of God. It is addressing present circumstances that renders theology's relevance. Any constructive theology that can rightly be named Christian must draw on a range of sources or formative factors. Scripture and tradition together "mediate the primordial revelation",<sup>131</sup> as Macquarrie puts it, and a balance must be held between experience and revelation; present experience within the faith community gives rise to theology and enables us to apprehend the 'primordial revelation' as revelation. Christian theology needs constant rethinking and renewing (within certain limiting criteria), and thus culture plays a part as a formative factor. Finally any constructive theology must necessarily include reason as one of its sources; this will entail critical, corrective and speculative reason. 'Theologies' that reject scripture and tradition for one reason or another, and concern themselves essentially with experience and cultural factors are actually something other than theology. They may be highly relevant endeavours and be insightful, but they are not theology. Any Christian theology that takes as its sources only scripture with a touch of corrective reason may well be highly distinctive, but will not be relevant to contemporary experience. It is against these criteria that forms of ecological theology might be considered.

Recognising that the 'river of theological writing in this area...is turning into a flood', Scott<sup>132</sup> has proposed a classification grounded in four particular methodological criteria: these are first, the doctrinal resources used; second, the means through which extra-theological matters are introduced and their effects; third, the way in which continuities and discontinuities between humanity and non-human nature are construed; and fourth, the view of modernity being held as a premiss.

Scott's typology is in two broad categories: provincialism and secularism,<sup>133</sup> which denote specific methodological decisions. Provincialist accounts give primacy to Christian theological sources of scripture and tradition, and hence hope to recover the world. Secularising accounts give priority to worldly knowledge and cultural factors as prime shapers of a refashioned 'Christianity'. These two categories are each broken down again by two qualifiers: modernising and anti-modernising,

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<sup>131</sup>John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* *op. cit.* 9. For methodological criteria, see also Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, (London: SCM, 1994); Colin Gunton, Stephen Holmes, Murray Rae (eds.) *The Practice of Theology*, (London: SCM, 2001).

<sup>132</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", in *Ecotheology*/4,(1998), *op. cit.*

<sup>133</sup> Peter Scott also discusses these in, "Nature in a 'world come of age.'" *New Blackfriars* 78/919 (1997): 356-68.



and these are indicated by hermeneutical and metaphysical decisions as well as by methodological factors based on source choices.

While any classification will offer categories of only approximate fit, this typology is helpful in two particular ways in connection with this study. It clarifies what might reasonably be called Christian theology and what might arguably not be included; and it offers an insight into the kind of account of atonement that might be functioning as an underlying premiss. The secularising thrust of some accounts gives rise to questions about their (eco)theological credibility. As Scott describes their main characteristics, they "lean heavily upon philosophies of nature, usually derived from the natural sciences, which are alien to Christianity. Help in the development of theological insight in ecology is sought, in extended fashion, from outside Christian faith."<sup>134</sup>

The modernising strand holds a belief in the modern project of human progress which is not as yet complete, and hence this has an evolutionary thrust. This is an account of natural theology: the introduction of the 'philosophical construal of the being and order of the world' in which nature is understood in 'the dynamic of creation and redemption.' Christ is not here ignored, but rather is stressed in cosmic dimensions enabling 'the emergence of scientific humanity', thus completing the modern project, as *Christus Evolutor*. Indeed Scott cites Teilhard de Chardin as a prime example of this position. This account might reasonably be construed as inadequate, Christian theologically, and it should be asked whether it is adequately ecological in character either.

Using Bergson's evolutionary scientific ideas, Teilhard produced a synthesis in which evolution functioned as a theological category and as a hermeneutical principle to transpose Christian belief out of what he considered a static worldview into one which recognised the world as in process of becoming. This he called cosmo-genesis, that is, evolution of life and spirit potentially becoming 'Christogenesis'. Thus Christ 'saves evolution' by being its mover, animator, guide and unifying force. This work stimulated renewed debate, particularly within Roman Catholicism, about the relation between science and religion. Teilhard's ideas were perhaps influential in Vatican II, but along with Whitehead's process thought, were "generally less significant for an indigenous tradition [e.g. in Britain] that was already integrating science and religion, but not under the sway

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<sup>134</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*



of one dominating metaphysic."<sup>135</sup> Part of Teilhard's agenda was to reconcile Darwinian evolutionary theory with Roman Catholic Christianity, but in effect, he is adopting the principle that 'nature' becomes the agent and has power, and he then re-presents this power as 'Christianity'. That is, 'nature' replaces God, but we will call it the Christian faith:

To say of Christianity that, despite appearances to the contrary, it is acclimatising itself and expanding in a world enormously enlarged by science, is to point to no more than one half of the picture. Evolution has come to infuse new blood, so to speak, into the perspectives and aspirations of Christianity. In return, is not the Christian faith destined, is it not preparing, to save and even take the place of evolution?<sup>136</sup>

Despite then their more limited influence - as Scott points out, the modernising secularism category has fewer exponents - these ideas represent an attempt to determine a cosmic axis of evolution which expresses the condition of survival for the human race. Teilhardian analysis is about the "social phenomenon ... that mankind is in process of re-assessing and regrouping itself."<sup>137</sup> As such, it seems difficult to reconcile ecological theology's standard objection to anthropocentrism - certainly articulated by its secularising forms - with what is essentially a discussion about survival: as Peacocke describes it, "... a sophisticated projection of man's desire for survival - not wrong in itself, but inadequate in providing the larger perspective..."<sup>138</sup> Peacocke refers here to the larger scientific perspective and its environmental consequences, to which it should be added that survival as a value is inadequate theologically in terms of giving expression to the notion of the earth and its fullness as the Lord's.

The ecotheology discussed earlier can be classified under one or other of Peter Scott's secularising forms, with the anti-modernising version the more popular. This version places a high value on philosophies of nature as theological shapers; and from connection with, and the influence of, feminist critiques in particular, it has abandoned belief in modernity as a progressive and on-going project. Its sources are eclectic, and at some considerable expense to Christian doctrines.

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<sup>135</sup> Arthur Peacocke, God and the New Biology (London: Dent, 1986), 85.

<sup>136</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man (New York: Harper, 1959) 297, cited in Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*

<sup>137</sup> Ian Barbour, Science and Religion (London: SCM, 1968) 228.

<sup>138</sup> Arthur Peacocke, God and the New Biology *op. cit.* 107.



Indeed traditional Christian metaphysics are rejected as essentially alienating: for these are taken to offer precisely those values that have caused the conditions for the ecological crisis, as claimed by Lynn White. A traditional pattern of Sin/Fall/Redemption separates humanity from nature, with Redemption construed as if it is some post-material pristine state. As such, this-worldly relationships both among humans and between human beings and non-human beings have not been held as important and hence neglected in favour of attention to some notion of the quality of the inner soul as a preparation for 'heaven'. The concept of harmony with nature and any construal of 'heaven' as peace on earth - as *shalom* - have not been developed.

While there is some truth in such critique, ecotheology in this category responds extremely at times; for example, Anne Primavesi writes that "Christian values, with their destructive lack of ecological wisdom, are no longer perceived by other systems of thought as having any positive role to play in the present crisis."<sup>139</sup> And it is these 'other systems of thought' - often philosophies of nature - that have been more readily imported into this ecotheology, which also has acquiesced in a negative evaluation of traditional Christian doctrine as unhelpful. Primavesi argues further that "a sustainable theology ... is (so) ... because it remains open to the hard data of science, to feminine imaginative consciousness and to the vision of thinkers and doers in other disciplines."<sup>140</sup> She is absolutely right here. But the importation of extra-theological insights must not be at the expense of central Christian doctrines and normative formative factors.

And so Scott observes that "...it is not always clear whether there is a determining place for Jesus Christ."<sup>141</sup> He cites specifically McFague as an example of this type with a christological account that is rather lacking in content, more a move to 'the doctrine of God in order to account for God's presence in the world.': she "moves beyond the issue of 'the scandal of particularity' - that Jesus Christ is 'the image of the invisible God' - by turning to a Christic paradigm which stresses the

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<sup>139</sup> Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis* *op. cit.* 23. Unlike some ecotheologians who work within this broad framework, Primavesi does not choose to jettison traditional sources wholesale. She affirms the importance of shared memory and seeks a thorough re-interpretation of the Genesis texts 'as a decisive event in the life of the tradition, as the basis for a sustainable theology...in the face of ecological apocalypse.' But Christianity's central doctrines of Creation, Fall, Incarnation and Atonement are seen as basic to non-egalitarian and unecological values of patriarchy and anthropocentrism.

<sup>140</sup> Anne Primavesi, "Ecofeminism and Canon", in *This Sacred Earth*, *op. cit.* 345.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*



sacramentality of bodies."<sup>142</sup> Another prime example of this is Fox, discussed earlier, who presents Christ as, *inter alia*, the new Adam<sup>143</sup> who functions as "a poet, a storyteller and artist."

Underlying the work that Scott terms modernising provincialist is the view that modernity is, as yet, an incomplete project. As such, the thrust of its strategy is towards a commitment to its completion, through, as Scott says, "the modernising of nature - albeit in eco-friendly ways."<sup>144</sup> A christological basis and rationale are fundamental to this account, and Scott isolates two sets of reconciling relations in operation here, which between them offer a conventional scheme of Christ, church, world, and together form a pedagogy and a proclamation. These relations are specified as:

...first, the relation between the salvation which inheres in Christ and the ecclesial culture which needs to learn and relearn the enacted message of salvation; second, the relation between the proclamation of the message by the ecclesial culture and the wider society. As bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the churches are required to 'perform' the salvific Christian message in relation to nature and mediate that salvific Christian message to the host society.<sup>145</sup>

Along with this conventional framework come conventional views of the sharp distinction between humanity and nature. Humans *in imago Dei* are made responsible for the care of nature, and it is human form which functions as mediator. "Expressed theologically, nature is mediated to God anthropologically by humanity and soteriologically by the human nature of Christ."<sup>146</sup> Given that here, humans are God's appointed agents charged with completing the modern project, not surprisingly the language employed by the ecotheological exponents in this category derives from the dominion motif in Genesis; hence the call to stewardship of nature, and even to its mastery. Faricy is a clear example of this type, and says it all really, along with a resonance of the Great Chain of Being:

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<sup>142</sup> *ibid.* E.g. Sallie McFague, construing the world as God's body, "[W]ithin a Christic framework, the body of God encompasses all of creation in a particular salvific direction, toward the liberation, healing and fulfilment of all bodies." The Body of God: An Ecological Theology (London: SCM, 1993) 160.

<sup>143</sup> Matthew Fox, Original Blessing *op. cit.* 239.

<sup>144</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

As a result of God's having created us in the image of God Himself, we have dominion over the other creatures. We are masters of nature and responsible for it.... We are masters of the plants and animals *because* we are in the image of a transcendent and all-powerful God, the Lord of all things, ourselves and plants and animals included. So, then, not only nature is de-divinized, but also our relationship with nature ... although nature belongs to God, God has made us in his image and given us dominion over nature. It is not we who are related to God through nature, but nature that is related to God through us. Nature, having been de-divinized, is nevertheless related to God; it receives the dignity of being under God's sovereignty through being under our sovereignty. We are responsible to God for the world and the rest of the world is related to God through us. Nature is now completely dedivinized. Nature has been shown to be radically distinct from God and we have been distinguished from nature...Thus we are freed from nature and nature itself is freed for our use. Both we and nature are dedivinized and freed for progress. This matter-of-factness about both us and nature is the precondition for the development of science, for technology and for social, political and economic progress...This is not to say that we are free to exploit nature; our task is to take care of and to build the world, exercising the dominion given us by God, carrying out our stewardship.<sup>147</sup>

With the relations between God, humanity and nature specified in this way, Faricy affirms the false ontological status that raises human beings out of the created order and denies any mode through which the non-human creatures may be understood as having any good of their own, their God-given ends and purposes that do not require human mediation. And there is a paradox here, in this category: on the one hand, there is a commitment to the modern project and the idea of progress, yet on the other hand, a clear resistance to the Darwinian precept that rooted humanity in nature rather than outside or above it. Darwinism is central to modernity, the notion of progress deriving from evolutionism.

Scott's final category, anti-modernising provincialism, includes theologians who are rethinking the relations between human and non-human nature, and offering a full theological account of the natural conditions of humanity. They draw heavily on Christian doctrinal resources, in particular the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation are related in a reconciling dynamic:<sup>148</sup> Christ, as Logos, both shapes creation and also emerges as that shaped matter which is the life of Jesus Christ. Creation and redemption are held together with incarnation providing the 'rationale' of creation, which expresses God's commitment to redeem as

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<sup>147</sup> Robert Faricy, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* *op. cit.* 4-5.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*



continuous with God's action in creation in the beginning and continuously. "Creation and Incarnation may both be regarded as sacrificial actions of God: acts of condescension which grant a future to creatures."<sup>149</sup>

The view of modernity taken in this category is that it is either over or ambiguous. Hence there is no commitment to any concepts of progress to complete the modern project, and, the language of stewardship and dominion is not stressed. What is emphasised is the role of the Spirit in creation. While the tendency in theology has been to stress the relation between the Logos and human salvation via Jesus Christ, a strong pneumatology redirects attention toward creation as a whole. As Scott puts it, "a firmer accent on the Spirit stresses non-human nature, the human nature of Jesus and the eschatological perfection of all creation of which the resurrection of Jesus Christ is proleptic anticipation."<sup>150</sup>

Scott's typology is, as suggested, helpful in the context of this study, for it clarifies which categories are adequately Christian theologically, and also one can infer from their characteristics the kind of account of atonement that might be functioning as an underlying premiss. With reference to the stated criteria for Christian theological adequacy, the secularism types of both varieties eliminate themselves, not least because of their lack of affirmation of the prime sources of theology. As is apparent, both types do not regard scripture and tradition as normative. Neither of the provincialism types falls foul of these particular criteria. Although different in character, each is within the remit of what might reasonably be considered Christian theology. In terms of this study, the implicit account of atonement is crucial. To express how all nature, human and non-human, might be understood or construed within a soteriological framework needs an objective account. Subjective accounts stress human action and the development of appropriate sensibilities, while exemplarism in particular stresses right praxis in *imitatio Christi*. These are important aspects of a fully adequate account of atonement in relation to human beings, but clearly are not relevant to non-human nature in its own terms. The secularism types have already been excluded on other grounds, but, for the record, the ecotheology in the more popular anti-modernising strand is variously either subjectivist and/or exemplarist. That is, we are to develop so as to come to love nature, and care for it in some practical ways; in sum, the emphasis is on particular ethics.

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<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

Of the provincialist categories, with its strong stress on stewardship as a way of cashing out the language of dominion and mastery, and its understanding of *imago Dei*, the modernising type of ecological theology again emphasises human action and right-praxis orientation. However, the anti-modernising provincialist category offers an objective account of atonement. God's action in Christ constitutes the gift of salvation; the Christ-event in its uniqueness as God's own act is affirmed. Invoking the 'bridge concept' of assumption, Moltmann provides a fitting example of this type:

The Son, the eternal counterpart within God himself, becomes the Wisdom, the pattern, through which creation is made. The Son in whom the world is created becomes flesh, and himself enters into the world in order to redeem it. He suffers the self-destruction of creation in order through his sufferings to heal it. What is not assumed by God in this way in his creation cannot, either, be healed. God the Spirit is also the Spirit of the universe, its total cohesion, its structure, its information, its energy. The Spirit of the universe is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and shines forth in the Son.<sup>151</sup>

Moltmann's ecological theology provides a way of investigating accounts of atonement and how these might relate to all nature: the very focus of this study. Moltmann's ecological christology and soteriology will be discussed in chapters three and four. A broader discussion of atonement theory and the ways it might relate to the redemption of nature forms the subject matter of the next chapter.

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<sup>151</sup> Jürgen Moltmann God in Creation, *op. cit.* 16.



## Chapter 2      Atonement: ways of meaning, understanding and interpretation and their relation to the redemption of nature

A doctrine of the atonement is an attempt to achieve an understanding - albeit a necessarily partial one - of the sense of the event of the cross, of the scope and the ground of the gift of God's salvation in Christ. Atonement has a range of resonances: reconciliation, the redeeming of fractured relationships, and the overcoming of alienation and estrangement. It is not synonymous with salvation, for atonement is linked specifically with the event of the crucifixion; rather, salvation is wrought by Christ's atoning work on the cross, achieved through the power of the Spirit, and God's steadfast love is its source.

'Salvation' is an idea which has the widest scope, including the healing of individuals and social groups and even the conserving of a natural world ravaged and polluted by human greed. The quest for salvation is the search for authentic life .... Salvation, or the healing of life, issues from atonement, and this in turn has its basis in the cross of Christ .... (F)or Christian believers atonement happens because of the death of Jesus in a Roman execution one Friday afternoon .... (A)tonement *depends* upon that moment. In this sense the cross stands at the centre of life, and is relevant to all patterns of experience. It does not simply express and reveal the extravagant love of God in bringing about atonement, but is the decisive point of that love, from which all else stems.<sup>152</sup>

It is this 'decisive point' that has given us the word 'crucial', which means literally 'pertaining to the cross' and which is used generally to indicate some kind of relationship of dependence and necessity. Though it is far from immediately clear quite *how* it should be understood, the cruciality - or irrevocable centrality - of the cross for Christianity can, and should, be readily stated: "Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there ... you do not understand Christ till you understand his cross."<sup>153</sup> The weight

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<sup>152</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event and Present Salvation: *op. cit.* 3-4.

<sup>153</sup> P T Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross (London: Independent Press, 1909) 44-5. For other accounts that stress the centrality of the cross for theological reflection, see for example: Paul Fiddes, *op. cit.* John Goldingay (ed), Atonement Today, *op. cit.*; Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.*; 'The Atonement: R W Dale on the centrality of the cross' Theology Through The Theologians (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 169-86; Alister McGrath, The Enigma of the Cross, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987); John McIntyre, The Shape of Soteriology, *op.cit.*;



of this statement should not be underestimated, nor the cross in any way romanticised. In its historical and cultural context the crucifixion of Christ was an horrific death associated with contempt and ignominy. Yet for Christianity, an understanding of Christ's action is the kind of knowledge that is the narrow gate to discover and rediscover that which both calls us to faith and also preserves us in faith .

But understanding is not unproblematic, for salvation is an elusive concept; as Haight observes wryly, "every Christian knows its meaning until asked to explain it."<sup>154</sup> For the death of Christ, as God's action, transcends our ability finally to know it. We are obliged both to try to understand and also to accept our limitations to do so. Hence the search for authentic life - for salvation - has the character of a quest; but, to borrow from Robert Browning, our reach must necessarily exceed our grasp. We are enabled in this search by God's self-revelation in Christ at that decisive point where we glimpse God: in Christ's atoning work on the cross where God draws near to the point of identity - genuinely at-one-ment.

Christianity has been shaped by the ways in which God's self-disclosure in Christ have been apprehended, and how Christ's work of atonement has been interpreted. But there is also something about the word 'God' that resists human attempts to capture it in thought and expression. "The mystery of atonement is hidden ... in the depths of the divine life."<sup>155</sup> At the same time it offers grounds for hope beyond tragedy; grounds for hope that are empowered and sustained by the proclamation that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.' Ultimately, there remains a 'mystery in our midst', and accounts of atonement are attempts to unravel a part of that mystery.

Most accounts of atonement are attempts to understand the way in which the death of Jesus is related to the salvation of the world. As in the story, there is both a decisive moment and a wider context for understanding its significance. In fact, doctrines of atonement might be described as a range of developed metaphors whose common point of reference is the story and the death at its climax. Narrative (including not only the story of Jesus but also the whole history of the covenant

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John Moses, The Sacrifice of God, *op.cit.*; John Stott, The Cross of Christ (Leicester: IVP, 1986); V White, Atonement and Incarnation, *op. cit., et al.*

<sup>154</sup> Roger Haight, "Jesus and Salvation: an essay in interpretation," Theological Studies 55 (1994): 225-251.

<sup>155</sup> John Moses, The Sacrifice of God *op. cit.* 166.



in the OT and the anticipation of future history) is the unavoidable genre needed to say what is being referred to in the doctrines: the death of this man in this way. The metaphors probe the depths and implications of the story.<sup>156</sup>

Atonement is a process in which the God the Son accomplishes his mission to redeem and save the world to return it to God the Father. The word 'atonement' - an English word - is rare in the translated New Testament. The NSRV has 'atonement' twice in the New Testament: the phrase 'sacrifice of atonement' occurs both in Romans 3.25 and in Hebrews 2.17. 'Atonement' occurs 75 times in the Old Testament in the NRSV. The phrase 'atoning sacrifice' occurs twice in the New Testament: 1 Jn2.2; 4.10. The RSV favours the term reconciliation. As other New Testament texts imply, *eg.* Gal 4.4-5; 2 Cor 5.16-21; Phil 2.6-11; John 3.16, this *process* of atonement has a broader base. There is a range of resonances, which relate for example, to (i) redeeming those under the law, (ii) a new creation because in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, (iii) Christ emptying himself in obedience unto death, and (iv) God so loved the world that God gave God's only son.

A doctrine of atonement does not then refer only to the work of Christ, but embraces all three persons in the Godhead. The salvific purpose of God will be achieved *via* the actions - the life and the death - of the Son, and its benefits are made available through the Spirit which will blow where it wills, including in ways and in places which will not yet be known. It is a matter of always already and not yet, for Christ was there in the beginning in God's first redemptive act of creation. And while the world has been redeemed - the Christ-event as the 'high-water mark of God's providential activity' as Macquarrie<sup>157</sup> puts it - the world is manifestly not yet redeemed; that is, this trinitarian gift must be understood eschatologically.

God's salvation is wrought through Christ's arduous work of atonement on the cross: both a divinely-authored act in a strong sense, and also surely a human act in which the person Jesus fears, faces and suffers the cruellest death. And in so doing, he gave himself for others with a perpetual cry from the cross for others to give themselves. This dual aspect, of both divine and human agency and effect, is characteristic of two 'poles' of atonement theory: the objective and the subjective.

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<sup>156</sup> David Ford, "The Face on the Cross," *Anvil* 11/3 (1994): 215-25.

<sup>157</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology op. cit.* 314.



The question is, how does an historical act in a specific place and time, somehow constitute universal saving power in perpetuity? That is, for all time and in all places both before and since that particular act. So somehow the cross is the intersection between time and the timeless, and this historical event is invested with cosmic significance.

This is the Christian claim from scripture and tradition: that Christ's action *constituted* God's gift of salvation, and was not merely *illustrative* of it. Hence an objective account construes atonement "wrought once and for all by God in the history of the world, in virtue of which things are not as they were .... something accomplished, something done."<sup>158</sup> As Fiddes expresses it, the Christ-event is a 'new experience' in the life of God: God's experience is 'increased' and this expansion changes God in some way.<sup>159</sup> That is, this particular act constituted universal redeeming possibilities because it effected a change in perpetuity in its agent.<sup>160</sup> An objective account therefore locates the significance of the cross in a once-for-all transaction in the past, and essentially establishes and holds a distinction between redemption and revelation.

To be authentically Christian, an account of atonement must place its emphasis at this objective 'pole', for it is here that the distinctiveness of the particularity of the Christ-event as God's act is affirmed. But expression must also be given to the way in which its universal effects are relevant within the life of the believing community. Historically, the Christian movement emerged out of the shared experience of Jesus as Saviour; and from there Christianity grew and continues to grow because Jesus continues to be experienced as the bringer or mediator of God's salvation. Subjective,<sup>161</sup> or revelationist, accounts locate the significance of the cross in the present, as the current experience of salvation. Not a transaction 'above our heads or before our time', but the particular act which illustrated

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<sup>158</sup> Leonard Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Atonement (London: Nisbet, 1951) 149-50, cited V White, *op. cit.* 26.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event, Present Salvation *op. cit.* 27.

<sup>160</sup> See Vernon White, Atonement and Incarnation *op. cit.* This is not to say that God changes his attitude, which is eternally gracious. The death of Christ is an event in God's life - his activity is at once stable and dynamic. As in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Father desires reconciliation constantly; a particular historical event brings this to light in a specific way: "...this signal event of Christ's saving work ... is the high-water mark of God's providential activity ... that has never been wanting and ... God's reconciliation is equiprimordial with his 'creation.'" John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology *op. cit.* 314; See also D M MacKinnon, 'Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement', in ed. F G Healey, Prospect for Theology. Essays in Honour of H H Farmer, (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1966).

<sup>161</sup> See Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.*, 159, for decisive criticism of subjective accounts; also J Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, 317; D M MacKinnon, *op. cit.*



universal redeeming possibilities because it effects some kind of change in the *objects* of that action.

Thus, through Christ we can be transformed, either as some kind of internal, spiritual process in personal relationships, or in some external way whereby Christ, as the perfect exemplar, stimulates us to reform and repent. This latter form is referred to as the exemplary account,<sup>162</sup> and stresses the objective aspect of the subjective pole. Exemplary accounts, *per se*, are 'unstable' in the sense of being inadequate without the support or framework of other models:<sup>163</sup> there is no account of the death of Christ, and hence of the meaning wrought by the cross, in the notion of Christ as type of exemplar. Fiddes<sup>164</sup> makes the connection between the objective and the subjective poles - between 'past event and present salvation' - such that the Holy Spirit links God's 'expanded experience' to us in the present: the Spirit conveys the living divine personhood of Christ to us so that the experience within God's own life - which is Christ's experience - elicits our response.

Accounts of atonement have historically been culturally mediated, deriving from and feeding back into their own socio-political contexts, and reflective of prevailing philosophical ideas. Each account bears towards either the objective or the subjective, with the modern stress tending to the subjective, though each was systematised in the early period: the objective in Anselm (1033-1109), the subjective in Abelard (1079-1142). The theological task lies in holding these poles in creative tension; too great a stress on these divisions is both unsatisfactory and unhelpful,<sup>165</sup> for an adequate account of atonement must offer some measure of reflection of each aspect.

The following contemporary soteriological statement, from a recent report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, reflects an understanding of atonement as Christ's mission directed toward friendship and relationship with the Father and accomplished through the Spirit. Indeed this may well be valid: a construal of the nature of salvation which employs the language of contemporary

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<sup>162</sup> See Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.*, 157ff, for critical discussion of exemplarism; this is outlined below.

<sup>163</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, *op. cit.* 49.

<sup>164</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event, Present Salvation* *op. cit.* 28-9.

<sup>165</sup> See D M MacKinnon, 'Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement' *op. cit.* Also J Macquarrie, "The traditional division of views of the atonement into 'objective' and 'subjective' is unsatisfactory .... we must look for a model that will transcend the distinction." *Principles of Christian Theology* *op. cit.* 316-7.



concerns and concepts - the notion of a God who suffers with us, in our existential situation and in terms of subjective human response.

As incarnate Son and indwelling Spirit, God enters our situation of evil, suffering and mortality, shares with us the pain of our alienation, bears with us the pain of overcoming our enmity and healing our estrangement, sustains us in the struggle to be truly human, redirects our lives towards the Father as the source and goal of our being. The New Testament summary narratives of trinitarian self-giving imply all this.<sup>166</sup>

But it is interesting to compare this understanding with the more universal soteriological claim from Athanasius that "... it were not worthy of God's goodness that the things he had made should waste away..."<sup>167</sup>; a claim consistent with "... the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. For He alone ... was ... both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father..."<sup>168</sup>

These two understandings of God's redeeming purposes seem to demonstrate well the diminution in scope that Vernon White describes when, borrowing from Dillistone,<sup>169</sup> he observes that, " 'from the eternal cosmos to the existential moment' seems an apt title for the story of man's long enquiry about the possibility of reconciliation."<sup>170</sup> The point he is making here is that our understanding of atonement in terms of its scope is inversely proportional to the 'size' of the world as we perceive it. That is, against a 'limited' Graeco-Roman view of the world it seemed possible to see Christ's work as universally effective; while the universe as we perceive it now in its diversity seems too complex and pluralistic for such a claim to be intelligible or plausible. And in view of the accumulation of knowledge, "it is easy to see why it has become much more credible to limit the claim of Christ's reconciliation to a given believing soul in a particular context, rather than try to sustain it for the whole world."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, The Mystery of Salvation (London: Church House, 1995) 43.

<sup>167</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, cited Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement *op. cit.* 103.

<sup>168</sup> Athanasius *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* *op. cit.*

<sup>169</sup> F W Dillistone, The Christian Understanding of the Atonement (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1968).

<sup>170</sup> Vernon White, Atonement and Incarnation *op. cit.* 3.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.* It is the aim of White's book to defend the full constitutive understanding of universal atonement in Christ against the background not only of the external pressures of knowledge of an



But such a 'limit' has serious implications for Christian theology. It collapses the distinction between redemption and revelation, and places too much emphasis on human response and action, acquiescing in the prevalent subjectivist heresy that man-made modernity will usher in the kingdom. It fails to express with any adequacy that atonement is God's eschatological act, directed toward the completion of God's creation, and universal in its scope for the reconciliation of all things. Surely such an overly subjective emphasis fails also to understand that the Spirit is God's eschatological transcendence,<sup>172</sup> and instead (mis)construes the third Person as purely immanent.

As the Doctrine Commission's 'definition' says, '[A]s incarnate Son and indwelling Spirit, God enters our situation ...': a statement of some truth, but also an inadequate one which addresses primarily the 'existential moment'. The historical and the particular are the *modes* through which God chooses to act: redemptive, crucial moments in the midst of time which have universal significance, and indeed are markers of the cosmic covenant. "Atonement is the way by which the order of time and space is restored and brought to perfection."<sup>173</sup> Such a claim must be grounded in an objective account of atonement, and understood eschatologically. It cannot be predicated upon revelation and response, nor grounded in a premiss of epistemological necessity. "[S]alvation (including its reconciling effects) is constituted primarily by divine action, not by human knowledge of that action .... knowledge must not supplant 'effective action' as the defining characteristic of Christ's work; epistemology must not replace ontology."<sup>174</sup> Any construal of atonement that seeks to make explicit that all of God's creation, human and non-human, is within the scope of soteriological concerns, will find its ground at the heart of Christianity's particular understanding of universality: ontological universality achieved eschatologically.

Be that as it may, the more modern trend in atonement theory reflects the kind of crisis that White refers to, that of credibility and confidence in the full traditional claim of the universal salvific efficacy of the Christ-event, and hence it tends to favour the subjective pole. As Fiddes observes,

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expanding universe, but also of internal pressures within Christian theology concerning the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is, of course, integral to soteriological theory.

<sup>172</sup> For a discussion of the Spirit as God's eschatological transcendence see Colin Gunton, 'God the Holy Spirit: Augustine and his successors' in Theology Through The Theologians *op.cit.* 105-28.

<sup>173</sup> Colin Gunton, "Universal and Particular in Atonement Theology," *op. cit.* John Stott, The Cross of Christ *op. cit.* also observes, from a scriptural viewpoint, that subjective theories fail to recognise the cosmic and corporate dimensions of sin witnessed in the New Testament.

<sup>174</sup> Vernon White, Atonement and Incarnation *op. cit.* 20ff.



Earlier theories of atonement (with the partial exception of Abelard's) tended to begin at the objective end of the spectrum of understanding with some kind of transaction, and then added a subjective appendix. Modern ideas have tipped the balance the other way; they tend to begin at the subjective end with a present human response to God, and then to affirm an objective focus for response. This, I believe, is basically the right orientation for Christian thinking today. If we are to serve our age and our culture - though this includes being prepared to challenge it at some points as well as being shaped by it - we must learn from insights of the human sciences into the nature of relationships and personality.<sup>175</sup>

The open-ended nature of atonement theory reflects the fact that the Church has never formulated or canonised any specific doctrine of the atonement<sup>176</sup> with the kind of explanatory precision that it did with the doctrine of the person of Christ (Council of Chalcedon 451) or the doctrine of the Trinity (Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed 381). Instead, ways of construing the meaning of Christ's work are expressed in a range of metaphors, developed in particular contexts and clothed in the language and ideas of those contexts. Each of these metaphors offers insights that contribute to a richer appreciation of the mystery of the cross; and again the open-endedness of atonement theory means there is always scope both for the re-development of established metaphors, and for the articulation of new metaphors.

The wisdom of the cross is the intractable, endlessly disorienting and reorienting heart of Christian theology. One never masters it, wraps it up or defines it adequately, and the metaphorical explosion to which it has given rise is the linguistic expression of this.<sup>177</sup>

Each of the different ways of making sense of atonement has arisen in a particular cultural situation, against a background of a particular thought-world, and so each

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<sup>175</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event, Present Salvation *op. cit.* 29. However, Fiddes hopes that although 'this might be called 'subjective', ... it will work hard at understanding the 'objective focus' of God's activity.' Nevertheless his method is shaped by the language of psychology with a stress on the individual human subject. And see also Paul Avis, 'The Atonement' in Geoffrey Wainwright (ed), Keeping the Faith: Essays to Mark the Centenary of *Lux Mundi*, (London: SPCK, 1989): "It is the strength of 'exemplarist' theories of the atonement that they can point to the teaching and the life style of Jesus as proclaiming in word and deed that God's salvation is at hand, that forgiveness is offered." 127.

<sup>176</sup> See Ch 1, n 4; also John McIntyre, The Shape of Soteriology *op. cit.* 1; John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology *op.cit.* 314.

<sup>177</sup> David Ford, "The Face on the Cross" *op. cit.*



became integral to the contemporary understanding of reality of any given historical period. The main atonement metaphors that come through the tradition are sacrifice, victory and justice. Not mutually exclusive, they mutate and combine in different ways as they contribute to different meanings and interpretations in different contexts.

The New Testament Church interpreted Jesus' death in sacrificial terms, which developed out of a context of the Temple cult. As Ford points out, "... it is no accident that the most fully developed theology of the death of Jesus in the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews, is conceived in terms of priesthood and sacrifice in the temple."<sup>178</sup> Sacrifice is a problematic concept which will be discussed more fully later, in chapter five, which will include an engagement with Hebrews. For the moment, agreement is here stated with, *inter alia*, Gunton who considers that sacrifice is "the dominant New Testament metaphor",<sup>179</sup> and with Moses, for whom "the notion of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice is so significant within the New Testament that no theory of atonement can stand within the Christian tradition if it does not incorporate the element of sacrifice."<sup>180</sup>

Objections to the idea of sacrifice are likely to be based in misunderstandings and reductionist accounts of it. The legacy of Wellhausen<sup>181</sup> still casts a shadow over attitudes to sacrifice; that is, the view that critique of cultic practices present in the prophets, e.g. Amos 4.4,5; Hosea 6.6; and in the Psalms, e.g. 51, was a part of a developing new morality through the Old Testament. This was not the case. The Prophets and the Psalmist were using irony to criticise the practice of making offerings in the wrong spirit, rather than the cultic practice itself. But the Wellhausian moral evolution account has led to the view that the sacrificial cult was a set of crude and unsophisticated practices which were disappearing to be replaced by a new moral code. Instead the sacrificial system was sophisticated and flourishing; it stopped only when it was forced to because the Temple fell in AD 70. The resonances of Old Testament sacrifice are many and varied: in terms of

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<sup>178</sup> David Ford, Self and Salvation: Being Transformed, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 208. For the purposes of this study - the understanding of atonement in terms of all of God's created things - the atonement metaphor of sacrifice is likely to be the most helpful and congenial.

<sup>179</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>180</sup> John Moses, The Sacrifice of God, *op. cit.* 21.

<sup>181</sup> Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, transl. JS Black and A Menzies, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885). Wellhausen's conclusions were influenced by the evolutionary thinking current in his milieu at the time, ie. late 19th Century. Later Old Testament study has shown the errors, e.g. analysis of language has pointed up the irony inherent in prophetic speech, as mentioned, and also, *inter alia*, the simple logical point that the prophets were themselves also priests. That is, they were in the business of sacrifice, and wanted it done properly, with a right heart and mind. E.g. Gordon Wenham, The Book of Leviticus, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).



this particular study, "[T]he decisive factor of the cultic act of atonement is that this sacrifice of life is not a mere killing, a sending into nothingness, but it is a surrender of life to what is holy, and at the same time an incorporation into the holy...By means of the atoning rites ... the *nephesh* [body, soul, living thing] is dedicated to and 'incorporated into' the holy."<sup>182</sup>

Patristic theology from the second to the eighth centuries tended to understand atonement in terms of victory over evil powers in a thought-world shaped by the idea of cosmic conflict: a dualistic world-view in which God and Satan were engaged in battle. This metaphor of victory came to be known as the classic account as designated by Aulén;<sup>183</sup> for him, this was the dominant view of atonement and by describing it as 'classic', Aulén meant it was the oldest, the most true to Scripture, essential for proper atonement doctrine and also most appropriate for the twentieth century.<sup>184</sup> Aulén follows the developmental pattern of this view<sup>185</sup> through Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine, and sets out a summary of their position:

... in truth the classic idea of the Atonement, as it is set forth in the Fathers, is both clear and monumental. It sets forth God's coming to man, to accomplish His redemptive work; Incarnation and Redemption belong indissolubly together; God in Christ overcomes the hostile powers which hold man in bondage. At the same time these hostile powers are also executants of God's will. The

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<sup>182</sup> R Needham (ed), Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973) 107-8.

<sup>183</sup> Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor *op. cit.*

<sup>184</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising that Aulén thought the imagery of the battlefield as an appropriate way to understand the atonement as a cosmic conflict in between two world wars as it would have then resonated with contemporary experience - the context that conditions and mediates these construals. But this atonement metaphor of victory remains for some the leading idea. For example, John Macquarrie favours it in Principles of Christian Theology, *op. cit.*, and gives it a heightened individual existentialist 'spin' in Jesus Christ in Modern Thought: "It is a turning away with Christ from the temptations of the world, the temptations of power, wealth, sensual indulgence and so on, to the things of the kingdom of God." *op. cit.* 402. Understanding the cross as a metaphor for victory is also the account of choice for Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movement. See also J Denny Weaver, "I submit that for the modern church, which is coming increasingly to sense itself in a post-Christian and post-Christendom world, the Christus Victor image of atonement deserves special attention in the development of contemporary systematic theology .... (because) the work of Christ - atonement - as described in ... Christus Victor establishes a new social order which stands over against - in confrontation with - the structures of this world. 'Atonement for the Nonconstantinian Church', Theology (1993): 307-23. Weaver offers a fuller statement in favour of the *Christus Victor* model in his The Nonviolent Atonement, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>185</sup> Though Haight considers that Aulén's work seems now tendentious and misrepresents the authors it seeks to interpret. "Jesus and Salvation: an essay in interpretation," *op. cit.* Gunton finds it might be less well biblically grounded than is claimed and also overlooks some distinctions. Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 54ff.



patristic theology is dualistic, but it is not an absolute Dualism. The deliverance of man from the power of death and the devil is at the same time his deliverance from God's judgment. God is reconciled by His own act in reconciling the world to Himself.<sup>186</sup>

Various factors led to the demise of the metaphor of victory as the predominant way to construe atonement, not least its internal inconsistencies, and in particular the notion that in atonement, God was reconciled to himself as well as to humanity. For this presupposes that God's love and his wrath stood in contradistinction to one another. As Fiddes observes: "[T]he theory is that there is a struggle in God between his wrath and his love, and his love is stronger ... a theory which raises inescapable and uncomfortable questions about the character of God."<sup>187</sup>

There had always been elements of the metaphor of sacrifice present as well in the thought of Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius and Augustine, but Aulén indicates also that there began to develop in the thought of some of the Fathers a further theory of atonement, which heralded the onset of the hegemony of lawyers. These new ideas turned on legal concepts, and atonement was understood here in terms of a metaphor of God's justice; Aulén referred to this as 'the Latin theory of atonement'. "It is possible to fix with precision the time of the first appearance of the Latin theory. Tertullian prepares the building materials; Cyprian begins to construct out of them a doctrine of the Atonement."<sup>188</sup>

Tertullian and Cyprian were both lawyers, and their work set in motion what was to become the dominant development in the mediaeval and Reformation periods: the remit and nature of justice, in which Christ's work was understood as the mechanism through which breaches in the Divine law could be set right. This idea emerged throughout an historical period in which judicial systems were developing in the wider socio-political sphere. The atonement metaphor of justice was 'classically' stated by Anselm, in two volumes addressing their title Cur Deus Homo?<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor *op. cit.* 59.

<sup>187</sup> Paul Fiddes, Past Event, Present Salvation *op. cit.* 132.

<sup>188</sup> Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor *op. cit.* 81.

<sup>189</sup> Anselm of Canterbury Why God became Man, ET of Cur Deus Homo, E R Fairweather, A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham, Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM, 1956) .



Anselm was concerned to respond to this question in a rational way, and considered that earlier accounts of atonement failed in this matter. Part of his concern was also to respond to non-Christian objectors to the concepts of incarnation and crucifixion who considered these were dishonourable to God. He found previous accounts not to be rational: for example, Irenaeus' recapitulation theory he condemned as merely aesthetic, offering beautiful analogies otherwise ungrounded. While aesthetic arguments may be in some way compelling to the Christian, they are inadequate if cast adrift from a true theology of creation. This is a rational matter: morality for Anselm consists in conformity to God's good order, and human beings were created to love the highest good for its own sake and for no other reason. Thus, human beings need to be both rational and holy.<sup>190</sup>

Anselm criticised the victory metaphor, with its motif of ransom paid to the Devil, as assigning to the Devil rights over humanity; and also the inherent dualism of this account which allows a greater autonomy to the Devil than could be substantiated in scripture or through reason.<sup>191</sup> Gunton indicates agreement that there was a tendency with the victory metaphor for the metaphorical to acquiesce in the mythological. "In Gregory ... the victory is understood too literally, and the result is that *too much* is known about what is supposed to have happened."<sup>192</sup>

Anselm moves to discuss the meaning of Christ's atoning death in legal and juridical categories: an atonement metaphor of justice.<sup>193</sup> He begins with God's purposes for creation; that God created human beings to love the highest good for its own sake alone. Human beings were created in the image of God, and thus should be both rational and holy - the means by which they can fulfil their purpose. But "this purpose they frustrate by sin .... (which) is essentially an infringement of honour, a failure to render someone his or her due, as determined by his or her place in the social order."<sup>194</sup>

Anselm inhabited, of course, a mediaeval thought-world with feudal social arrangements which entailed a certain 'pecking order'. Thus any given offensive

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<sup>190</sup> Anselm, Book II, i. *op. cit.*

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.* vii.

<sup>192</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 64. Gunton is here highlighting the importance of the distinction between myth and metaphor: to speak too literally of the rights over humanity that the devil had first obtained, and had then been deprived of by deceit, is to fail to appreciate the metaphorical nature of the biblical language of the demonic.

<sup>193</sup> Discussed in Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 91ff. Gorringer's study is an engagement between atonement and the penal system.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*



act - or infringement of honour - against the king, or a knight or a peasant, was not regarded similarly, and differential compensation or satisfaction would be sought. "What, then, of an offence directed against an infinite being, God? Because we owe God our total obedience, even the most trivial offence demands an infinite satisfaction."<sup>195</sup> There is an aesthetic dimension to this: the demand for satisfaction is not a retributive demand, rather it is to restore a breach in the social order, wrought by an offence against God's honour, which should be understood in terms of God's good creation and the purposes God has for it. Sin is the violation of the beauty of creation.

Only Christ can offer this infinite satisfaction, for offence against an infinite being. Only Christ can restore integrity; human beings have nothing that can suffice to make adequate satisfaction, for already they owe everything to God. God must act according to God's dignity, and so justice demands punishment as just recompense for sin. 'But this concern for justice is essentially a concern for the integrity of both the social order and the cosmic order which it mirrors.'

There is a range of weaknesses in Anselm's atonement theology,<sup>196</sup> not least the lack of any adequate account of the actions of the triune God, for the stress is almost exclusively on the actions of the Son toward the Father. Also the theory appears as more an exercise in power than one of love; as Gunton observes, 'very little emphasis is given to the atonement as the place where reconciliation in the sense of a renewed personal walking with God is made real ... the cross is understood in a way that seems rather external to us, a transaction taking place in a different space and time from ours.' Despite these, and other weaknesses, Anselm does nevertheless draw attention to a centrally important concern: the way he explicates the atonement metaphor of justice makes clear the principle

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<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Criticisms of Anselm's atonement theology discussed by Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 93ff. Also in Paul Fiddes, Past Event, Present Salvation *op. cit.* 98ff. Unlike Gunton, Fiddes' main criticism of Anselm's theory is that it is overly objective, (though Gunton hints at this as well). Timothy Gorringe, considers the theory 'perverse' in its attempts to 'prove' the necessity and possibility of redemption without reference to the Gospel story; that it is 'profoundly ahistorical' and operates at a 'level of dazzling legal and aesthetic elaborations'; and that it has unjust implications - 'the earthly justice which was the analogue of such universal justice believed that the life of a serf was cheaper than that of the beasts.' *op. cit.* 100ff. Michael Walker is critical of the way that the metaphor has been historically construed as entirely theocentric; that is, only God is sinned against and has claims to justice. He seeks an understanding of human claims to justice, for in "place of the Jewish belief in a God whose justice is a cause for joy and hope, we have substituted a God whose justice is a cause for fear. Side by side with this theocentric emphasis has been a similar emphasis on the solidarity of the human race, bound together in the entail of Adam's sin and under one common sentence whether they be greengrocers or murderers." 'The Atonement and Justice', Theology (May 1988): 180-6. Jürgen Moltmann, in The Spirit of Life *op. cit.* draws a distinction between victims and perpetrators in a way he had not previously done.



that 'human life is rooted in its physical context'. Although his discussion foregrounds the 'legal and the moral rather than the cosmic aspects of the divine-human relationship', one can take from it that

There can be no merely moralistic or personalistic discussion of salvation which does not root human life in the context of the created order as a whole. Human alienation derives in part from wrong relations with the world about us, where the creation is idolatrously misused and sweeps up human agents into its power.<sup>197</sup>

The modern period - from the enlightenment onwards - has been dominated by a subjective understanding of atonement in which human beings are influenced morally by Christ's work and example; indeed the 'merely moralistic or personalistic discussion of salvation' that Gunton rightly criticises above. The intellectual backdrop to this subjective account has been the Enlightenment with its central motto - *sapere aude!* - which rejected any traditional or external authority to function as a model for the present; combined with the turn-to-the-subject nineteenth century philosophy with its stress on the individual knowing and feeling subject. The subjective account has been understood in terms of 'love' as systematised in the mediaeval period in the thought of Abelard, under the influence of his own existential situation of a tragic love affair. At heart, it is the view that love enkindles love in turn, and Fiddes explains that, in Abelard's view,

since ... it is humankind that needs to be reconciled to God while God himself does not need to be reconciled to anyone, the love of God is the *means* as well as the motive of redemption. The need is for human beings to be changed, and Abelard believes that the love of God revealed and present in Christ will create that change. Indeed Abelard hints that the transforming effect of the love of God is so potent that the human state will not simply be restored to its pre-Fall glory, but taken to a new level altogether.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 95.

<sup>198</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event, Present Salvation* *op. cit.* 143.



The modern (re)statement of the subjective account is based on the idea of moral influence, expressed by Schleiermacher<sup>199</sup> in terms of his category of 'God-consciousness'; the potency of Jesus' God-consciousness to nurture God-consciousness in the believing subject. Schleiermacher's soteriology is of a piece with his christology; his use of the category of God-consciousness was a part of his attempt to circumvent perceived problems with the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Person of Christ. Thus according to Schleiermacher, Christ was like all humanity in the sense of his human nature; but distinct from human beings by the constancy and potency - in the nth degree - of his God-consciousness, which was the mode of God's existence within the person of Christ.

Hence on this account, the christological basis to redemption in Christ is that the constancy of Christ's God-consciousness is such that it was not broken by his experience of suffering and death. Existentially, individual believers are redeemed by their participation in Christ's constant God-consciousness, and no longer imprisoned by evil. That is, incorporation in Christ means that those who believe become reconciled to God because the moral connection is severed between themselves and sin; this moral influence develops and nurtures God-consciousness in human beings. Schleiermacher makes the link between soteriology and christology thus:

The origin of every human life may be regarded in a two-fold manner, as issuing from the narrow circle of descent and society to which it immediately belongs, and as a fact of human nature in general. The more definitely the weaknesses of that narrow circle repeat themselves in an individual, the more valid becomes the first point of view. The more the individual by the kind and degree of his gifts transcends that circle, and the more he exhibits what is new within it, the more we are thrown back upon the other explanation. This means that the beginning of Jesus' life cannot in any way be explained by the first factor, but only and exclusively by the second; so that from the beginning He must have been free from every influence from earlier generations which disseminated sin and disturbed the inner God-consciousness, and He can only be understood as an original act of human nature, *i.e.* as an act of human nature as not affected by sin. The beginning of His life was also a new implanting of the God-consciousness which creates receptivity in human nature; hence this content and that manner of origin are in such close relation

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<sup>199</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (1928; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976). See also Colin Gunton's Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 9ff, for a discussion of Schleiermacher's 'reductionist' doctrine.



that they mutually condition and explain each other .... it is only through Him that the human God-consciousness becomes an existence of God in human nature ...<sup>200</sup>

This understanding of Christ's atoning work is perhaps an example of a theological error which will result from a sharp separation between redemption and creation: redemption restricted to individual human beings. There is no sense of redemption understood eschatologically, nor of the work of the Spirit. But of course, this is not based on a trinitarian model of God. Schleiermacher placed the Trinity in the appendix to his work, and seemed more to favour a construal that tends to the Platonist and pantheistic. Moreover as an account that has an essentially ethical basis - that is, premised on moral influence - this is an inadequate theological ethic. Human beings are not here understood within God's creation as a whole; it neglects that our creatureliness entails an understanding that is far richer in scope than that which is suggested by this category of 'God-consciousness'.

While it should be stressed again that there is a need for a subjective *aspect* in an account of atonement, this must be expressed in terms of what it means to be a human being in the sense of being a creature within a community of God's creatures, diverse in their variety. That is, an adequate theological ethic will be an "*ethic of createdness* which is informed by a *theology of creation*."<sup>201</sup>

It is clear that atonement has been understood historically in many different ways, and this continues to be the case. But despite the diversity in interpretation, accounts of atonement do have features in common. For underlying the various construals and ways of meaning, are certain key concepts which shape discussion of the logic or mechanics of atonement, irrespective of the interpretation. These key concepts concern first, the way that atonement is achieved, and second, the modes through which it is mediated.

In discussing the ways in which atonement is achieved, Gunton writes, "[T]he logic is inescapable: if Jesus is man before God, then he must be said either to *represent* or to be a *substitute* for the rest of us."<sup>202</sup> It is in these terms - of

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<sup>200</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* *op.cit.* 387-8.

<sup>201</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, 'God, Creation and the Christian Community: The Dogmatic Basis of a Christian Ethic of Createdness', in Colin Gunton (ed) *The Doctrine of Creation. Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 150, cited by Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1998) 229.

<sup>202</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 161.



substitution and representation - that accounts of atonement are couched; although related, they are not synonymous, and different nuances of meaning can be drawn from them.

The idea of Christ's death as 'substitutionary' comes from the translation of *anti*, meaning 'instead of' or 'in place of'; and despite the longevity of the tradition of a substitutionary understanding, it is not particularly well supported in scripture.<sup>203</sup> It is essentially based on Mark 10:45 (Matt 20:28) especially when this text is interpreted in the light of Isaiah 52:13. There are objections<sup>204</sup> to the notion of substitution, but Gunton is clear that it must necessarily be invoked:

The unredeemed past is more than sins and feelings of guilt; it is the objective disruption of the life and fabric of the universe. What is at stake is the movement of all things from their good creation to their destiny in Christ. All the ways of expressing the meaning of the atonement ... unfold the cosmic context of redemption. In such a theatre of war, vicarious or representative penitence is ontologically and conceptually puny .... we have to say that Jesus is our substitute because he does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That includes undergoing the judgement of God, because were we to undergo it without him, it would mean our destruction. Therefore the 'for us' of the cross and resurrection must *include*, though it is not exhausted by, an 'instead of'.<sup>205</sup>

The stress here is clear: the objective nature of Christ's atoning work and its universal scope in an eschatological context. It is also clear that a representative or vicarious understanding of 'for us' is inadequate on its own, although it is a vital

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<sup>203</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* *op. cit.* 97. Also Stephen Travis, 'Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgement in Paul's Thought about the Atonement', in John Goldingay (ed), *Atonement Today* *op. cit.* 21-38.

<sup>204</sup> Dorothee Sölle, *Christ the Representative* (London: SCM, 1967). Sölle objects to the notion of substitution because she considers it undercuts the concept of human autonomy. Also Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, (London: SCM, 1994): "The classical doctrine of substitutionary atonement ... is as little credible today as the classical doctrine of incarnation." 249. Hodgson is here trying to work out christologically and soteriologically an account he entitles 'The Christ-Gestalt: An Incarnate Praxis': this is an account of how God is redemptively present in the world "in *shapes or patterns of praxis* that have a configuring, transformative power within historical process, moving the process specifically in the direction of the creative unification of multiplicities of acts into new wholes that build human solidarity, enhance freedom, break down systemic oppression, heal the injured and broken, and care for the natural world." 250-1. It is interesting that Hodgson is here embracing the non-human world within his construal, which is however, another subjective/exemplary account. As such, as far as the natural world is concerned, the focus is more ethical than theological doctrinal, though these are, of course, not unrelated. C. Behan McCulloch, 'Theology of Atonement', *Theology* (Sept 1988): 392-400, finds the idea of substitution unbiblical both textually and in its view of God, and in certain versions, objectionable.

<sup>205</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 164-5.



part of the equation; "... substitution and representation are correlative, not opposed concepts."<sup>206</sup> The representative nature of Christ's death has a solid scriptural base, and the phrase *hyper hemon* - for us, or on behalf of - is present and recurs in some of the earliest New Testament traditions; eg. 2 Cor 5:21, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'; also Rom 5:19, 6:10-1. Servant imagery is here invoked: God's servant gives his life as a ransom for many, and will prosper, be exalted and lifted up.

Sölle,<sup>207</sup> objects to the concept of substitution and finds it undermines both our personal relationship with Christ and also our autonomy. She has attempted to separate it from representation *via* a philosophical distinction: substitution as a spatial concept, representation as a temporal one.

Representation regards man from the standpoint of time. It gains time for the man who is for the moment incapacitated. Substitution, on the contrary, is a spatial concept. In space, one thing can be replaced by another thing; in time, it is possible for one person to be represented by another person.<sup>208</sup>

Sölle is objecting to the idea that the substitute not only *replaces* the other person, but effectively also *displaces* the person from the scene; this displacement detracts from the dignity of the person. As she sees it, a representative is different in an important way; that is, somehow authorised to act on behalf of another while both the representative and the other person maintain their own place, as it were, and dignity remains intact.

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<sup>206</sup> *ibid.* 166.

<sup>207</sup> Dorothee Sölle, Christ the Representative, *op. cit.* Sölle has protested strongly against Moltmann for what she considers his attempt 'to develop a *theologia crucis* starting from the perpetrator, from the one who causes the suffering'. She finds this a theology of surrender and abandonment and amounts to a form of divine child abuse. Moltmann has responded in The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* stating that she has premised her critique on a misunderstanding, but notes also that "this misunderstanding has perpetuated itself as legend in certain areas of feminist theology." 175. In the history of soteriological debate, the idea of vicarious penitence was the focus for J McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement and its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life, (London: Macmillan, 1878) and R C Moberly, Atonement and Personality, (London: John Murray, 1901), both cited by Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* as sharing a 'fatal weakness ... a final collapse into exemplarism.' 162. Michael Winter, The Atonement, (London: Cassell, 1994), concentrates his account on the notion of vicarious intercession - Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25 - which runs a similar risk.

<sup>208</sup> Dorothee Sölle, Christ the Representative *op. cit.* 91.



This is not without insight: McIntyre<sup>209</sup> points out that such an idea will have some resonance in the modern world. But this is precisely its fundamental drawback; it has the hallmarks of the modern stress on the existential situation of the autonomous subject. As Gunton indicates in a decisive criticism, Sölle understands "Jesus as a temporary representative, one who stands in for us until we can, so to speak, stand on our own two feet, (but) the outcome is again Pelagian and exemplarist. We do not really require Jesus for our salvation here and now."<sup>210</sup> McIntyre has elicited a further nuance of meaning from 'vicarious', which is helpful in mediating between the two concepts and indicating how they correlate:

To sum up these possible correlations: *anti*, 'instead of' goes with 'substitutionary' and inclines towards 'vicarious'; *hyper*, 'on behalf of' goes primarily with 'vicarious' and as such has affinities with 'substitutionary', but when taken as 'in behalf of', or 'in the interests of', or 'in the name of' must be correlated with 'representative'.<sup>211</sup>

Taken together, substitution and representation are two essential parts of a whole relationship: before God, Christ takes our place, so that we may come and become reconciled, before God. What is not necessary, nor required in any way, is the understanding of substitution within a retributive framework as penal or punitive; an understanding that emerged after the Reformation in certain strands of Protestant thought, most notably in Calvin.

How can we become righteous before God? In the same way as Christ became a sinner. For He took, as it were, our person, that He might be the offender in our name and thus might be reckoned a sinner, not because of his own offences but because of those of others, since He Himself was pure and free from every fault and bore the penalty that was our due and not His own.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology op. cit.* 101-2.

<sup>210</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement, op. cit.* 162.

<sup>211</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology op. cit.* 99.

<sup>212</sup> Jean Calvin's commentary on 2 Cor 5:21, cited by Robert Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1983) 60. Cf. Calvin's commentary on John 1:29. Peterson also observes how, like Luther, Calvin wrote of Christ as 'the sinner who was burdened with the sins of His people': eg. *Institutes* II. xvi. 5; cf. *Luther's Works* 26: 277-8. For discussion of Calvin on Christ and redemption, see also François Wendel, *Calvin*, (London: Fontana, 1963) 215ff

The penal account of substitution is a development of the legal category of the atonement metaphor of justice, which was first articulated by Anselm (see above). But in the original, satisfaction was precisely the way in which God was enabled *not* to penalise the sinner. It was based on the idea of exchange, but this was not one in which a compensating penalty was sought in the way it is seen here in Calvin. Rather it was an offering by Christ - both as God and also on behalf of all - to the Father. Substitution "is not a legal transaction, but an act of unmerited grace."<sup>213</sup> This was made clear by Barth: that Christ in his divine person judged himself in order that human beings were not penalised. This is the nature of obedience and of service: forms of love to, and for, God and God's will for his creation.

For in the majesty of the true God it happened that the eternal Son of the eternal Father became obedient by offering and humbling Himself to be the brother of man, to take His place with the transgressor, to judge him by judging Himself and dying in his place. But God the Father raised Him from the dead, and in so doing recognised and gave effect to His death and passion as a satisfaction made for us, as our conversion to God, and therefore as our redemption from death to life.<sup>214</sup>

In his discussion of R W Dale's The Atonement, Gunton shows how Dale offers some defence of the penal idea by stressing that it is the divinity of Christ that is central. It is not Jesus as a man who takes the punishment, for that would be merely unjust. Rather, it is Jesus as God incarnate who suffers: the "one who dies is the one who exercises the divine function of judgement."<sup>215</sup> This was a similar point that Barth was later to make, as above. Gunton also cites Dale's insightful contrast between Anselm's 'positive' and Luther's 'negative' use of the idea of substitution and exchange:

Luther represented the Death of Christ as the endurance of the suffering due to the sins of our race. On Anselm's theory, Christ has secured our salvation because in His Death He clothed Himself with the glory of a unique righteousness, for which God rewards Him. On Luther's theory, Christ

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<sup>213</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 92.

<sup>214</sup> Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/1 (1956; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980) 157.

<sup>215</sup> Colin Gunton, 'R W Dale', in Theology Through The Theologians, *op. cit.*



has secured our salvation because in His Death He clothed Himself with the sins of the human race, so that God inflicted on Him the sufferings which the sins of the race had deserved.<sup>216</sup>

It was a weakness in Anselm's account - that salvation *appears* to be equated with the remission of a penalty - which was first interpreted by Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin (1509-64), and later re-understood against a background of enhanced retributive legal thinking influenced especially by the lawyer, Grotius (1583-1645). This led to the development of the "objectionable notion that Jesus is, as a man, punished by God in our stead."<sup>217</sup> There remain apologists for the doctrine of penal substitution,<sup>218</sup> but Macquarrie's view that is "even if it could claim support from the Bible or the history of theology, (it) would still have to be rejected because of the affront which it offers to reason and conscience .... (for it is) sub-Christian in its thought of God and its idea of reconciliation."<sup>219</sup> And moreover, as Gunton says,

Substitution is grace .... to say that Jesus is our substitute (albeit as also our representative) is to say that through him God re-establishes our life in its orientation to its promised perfection .... So it is in general: the Spirit is God enabling the world to be itself, to realise its eschatological perfection.<sup>220</sup>

Again Gunton stresses the eschatological nature of atonement: it is the action of the trinitarian God. It is only in these terms that God's redeeming involvement and purposes for all of his good creation can be adequately expressed. Accounts of atonement that are predominately subjectivist or exemplarist, or fail to adequately

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<sup>216</sup> R W Dale, The Atonement, 22 ed. (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1902) 290, cited Colin Gunton, *ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 161-2.

<sup>218</sup> For example, Christina Baxter, 'The Cursed Beloved: A Reconsideration of Penal Substitution' in John Goldingay (ed) Atonement Today *op. cit.* 54-72. Baxter's departure point is the question, "Thousands have been converted through the preaching of the penal substitutionary theory of the cross ... Have they been converted through a lie?" Although her defence concludes that it is God who bears the cost, this point is not made in the way that Dale makes it. Instead, she says, less persuasively, '... it is exacted against Christ because then there is the possibility that the innocent sufferer can be raised again'. Also, John Stott, *op. cit.* affirms the penal point of view. Robert Letham, The Work of Christ, (Leicester: IVP, 1993), offers a 'hard-line' account of penal substitution, limited atonement (elect only) and the opinion that God's justice takes priority over his mercy. An aspect of penal substitution is also present in the earlier Jürgen Moltmann - notably in The Crucified God *op. cit.* which will be discussed later.

<sup>219</sup> John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology *op. cit.* 315.

<sup>220</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 166-7.



construe the notion of substitution, will be overly or exclusively concerned with the individual human existential situation of alienation, sin and guilt. But all of God's created things, in their variety, have a good-of-their-own, to be brought in the power of the Spirit to perfection and participation on God's holy mountain.

The second set of ideas that are common to different atonement accounts relates to ways in which atonement is mediated. McIntyre<sup>221</sup> has indicated four bridge concepts which are first, identification, second, incorporation into Christ, third, the assumption of human nature and fourth, imputation. These are, of course, both inter-related and also intimately related to substitution and representation.

First, McIntyre cites 2 Cor 5:21 as a key text in atonement theology, and points out that however this is interpreted - sacrificially or juridically - the notion of identification will still be inferred from it. The incarnation itself is God's willing identification with his creation; and this sense of ready identification with human beings is clear in Jesus' baptism, ministry and in the nature of his death when he suffers dereliction and isolation from God.

The Sinless One in that quite unique act of self-transcendence passes over from being on one side, to identify himself with the wholly other, the unloving and the ungodly, who are the negation of his love and his righteousness.<sup>222</sup>

The concept of identification has developed through Paul's transformation of the Old Testament idea of 'drawing near'.<sup>223</sup> On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to approach God, and to draw as near as he could on behalf of Israel. In the New Testament, Christ becomes the altar and the Temple, and he is available to all. But it is not people, through a representative, who draw near to him, instead it is the other way round. In his suffering and death, God, in Christ, draws near to his people. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was not so much a conversion as a transformation; he did not need to repent - he was not an apostate, and was 'blameless under the law' - but he did need *metamorphosis*, to be changed into Christ's likeness. "To be transformed

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<sup>221</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology op. cit.* 103ff.

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.* 107.

<sup>223</sup> This is interestingly discussed by Patricia Williams, "Evolution, Sociobiology, and the Atonement," *Zygon* 33/4 (1998): 557-70. Her aim is to demonstrate that sociobiology affirms *inter alia* that atonement changes human nature.



like Saint Paul was to alter radically the very meaning of *draw near*, which for Saint Paul suggests the intimacy of identity .... Saint Paul's sense of transformation in[to] Christ is a *drawing near* to the point of identity ... truly an at-one-ment."<sup>224</sup> It is this concept of identification that unifies and controls those of incorporation and imputation.

Second, the notion of being in Christ, or incorporated into Christ, heralds a radically new ontology which entails the displacement of the old ontology. The atoning death of Christ makes available a new relationship according to God's will through the agency of the Spirit. Christ makes *manifest* this possibility, as he is the first-born of the new creation, (Rom 8): that is, Christ in his particularity and historical specificity. But Christ was there in the very beginning (John 1.1-3), as God's creative, revelatory Word that declares for all time that God has redeeming purposes for all of his creation as his eschatological goal. That which God speaks makes the reality possible in some way. While Jesus is particular, he is also universal: he is brought into constitutive relation with all creation through his resurrection. Thus, being in Christ has not only an existential dimension, but also a universalist thrust and cosmic breadth.<sup>225</sup> That is, it should be understood eschatologically and pneumatologically.

Third, the early Church Fathers understood 'incorporated into Christ' as premised on the fact of the incarnation: the Word of God, enfleshed, assumes unredeemed human nature and 're-processes' it from the inside. The logic of this is that redemption is made possible because Christ has assumed the reality of broken human nature; through the incarnation, human beings are incorporated into Christ and hence his death becomes our death, and this is the way in which our nature is freed from mortality and incorporated into immortality. Thus the notion of incorporation is here also a universaliser. McIntyre considers also how such a universalising principle might express that the benefits of redemption wrought through Christ are 'deployed cosmically into the whole of God's universe, such that God's purpose for the whole of creation was consummated.' He writes:

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<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Douglas Campbell has offered criticism of the *en christo* construal that concentrates only on old ontology/new ontology interpretation because it says nothing of Paul's eschatological theological logic, and neglects the key soteriological premiss of the work of the Spirit. He suggests the soteriological significance of *en christo* can be understood in terms of eschatological inauguration that takes place in suffering. He sees an incipient trinitarian structure in place within four years of the crucifixion, a filial pneumatology symbolised in baptism. 'The Logic of Eschatology: Galatians 3:28 in context.' Paper given at Research Institute in Systematic Theology Conference: The Theology of Reconciliation, King's College, London, September 6-8, 1999.



When the redemptive purpose of God is conceived of as extending beyond human destiny, into the whole of history, of nature and the universe ... then the universaliser is not so much incorporation as 'recapitulation', ... a notion which may be derived from Eph. 1:10, where it is said that it is God's good pleasure 'to gather all things in Christ (who is their head), things both in heaven and on earth'. The theme is that God had a purpose for the whole of his creation ... and ... God gathered up the entirety of the universe, nature as well as man, in the single redemptive act of the death of Christ...<sup>226</sup>

Fourth, the idea of imputation was central to Luther's notion of the 'happy exchange' which is basically that our sins were imputed to Christ and not held against us, and in exchange God imputes to us the righteousness of Christ: a process of diffusion, to put it biologically. On this view, Christ bears the judgement and the penalty in our place. By these means Luther understood human beings to be both righteous and sinners at the same time; intrinsically by nature, sinners, but extrinsically righteous by God's gift which is never a human possession. Against Augustine, the Reformers denied that human nature could be infused with righteousness, because for them, no such trace remained after the Fall.

McIntyre observes that this idea is at the heart both of Luther's and of Calvin's understanding of the mediation of Christ's atoning work, and perhaps even more so for their successors. For in later Protestant accounts - particularly influenced by Melancthon - the notion of imputation was construed almost entirely forensically. This forensic sense was already present in Luther, for whom, to be

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<sup>226</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology op. cit.* 106. For Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation see Book V of *Against Heresies* in Robert Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyon* (London: Routledge, 1997) 163ff. For a discussion of "cosmic recapitulation" and "logical recapitulation" in Irenaeus, see Christopher Smith, 'Chiliasm and Recapitulation in the Theology of Irenaeus', *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994): 313-331. Smith indicates that each of these two strands should be taken together, and that the 'major theme, preparation for glorification, appears in the "logical"...' He argues that Irenaeus is not construing a notion of restored Eden in the sense of a return to an original state, but instead, *via* an attempt to envisage a literal understanding of Isa 11:6-7, to fulfil the 'gospel promise of hundredfold compensation to the disciples and the still-unfulfilled blessing on Jacob which specified "fatness of the earth, plenty of corn and wine"...' Irenaeus's answer to the possibility of a literal fulfilment is recapitulation: "[I]t is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should ... revert to the food originally given by God ..., that is, the productions of the earth." Hence, the 'restored paradise will be extraordinarily fecund.' For another extensively discussed treatment of Irenaeus's doctrine of recapitulation, see Douglas Farrow, 'St Irenaeus of Lyons: The Church and the World', *Pro Ecclesia* 4/3 (1995): 333-355. Farrow makes the point that "Recapitulation in Irenaeus is a notion with full ontological and cosmological seriousness precisely because it maintains with unusual success both a trinitarian and an incarnational axis." But the focus of this discussion is ecclesiological, and is not concerned with the redemption of non-human beings.



'made righteous' had a legal connotation to be understood as to be 'declared righteous'. And McIntyre is critical of the way that popular forms of Scottish Calvinism failed to treat the idea of imputation adequately, for combined with a doctrine of double pre-destinarianism, it tended to allow "an unbridgeable gulf between imputed righteousness and genuine moral integrity."<sup>227</sup>

What seems here inadequate is again the exclusive stress on human sin and guilt as the arena of Christ's work of redemption, and the lack of any sense of eschatology or adequate pneumatology: a merely crude equation. Gunton's discussion of Irving's use of imputation demonstrates a more nuanced, theologically sound and sensitive approach. The body of Christ is, as flesh, both random and representative of the 'infected whole', but despite consisting of 'fallen flesh', the Spirit keeps it free from sin. This seems an account in rather medical terms in which the Spirit inoculates the body and wards off disease. Thus this particular body "becomes the first instance of restored humanity and the basis of redemption for others."<sup>228</sup> Irving writes:

As unfallen creation stood represented in unfallen Adam, so fallen creation stood represented in Christ; and as in Adam's fall all together fell, so in Christ's resurrection shall all be made alive again. This is the first part of imputation: that He freely came under, without any obligation of whatever kind, the load and burden of a fallen world's infirmity and sin.<sup>229</sup>

Gunton explains that Irving is here understanding imputation not in terms of exchange or of Christ being punished in our place; indeed he is specifically avoiding any 'mathematical or merely juridical conception of sin.' For on such a conception 'we lose the need to find in the Spirit the agent of the accomplishment of Christ's work' - hence the inadequate pneumatology - and instead reduce atonement to simply the redressing of a mistake. Irving's conception of salvation counters such a reductionist account, and Gunton approves: "... it is the imagery of priesthood and sacrifice that takes centre stage, because by its means it becomes possible to see the atonement in terms of grace, gift and love; and not the

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<sup>227</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* *op. cit.* 104. McIntyre cites Burns' poem "Holy Willie's Prayer" which is ironic testimony to this.

<sup>228</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 132.

<sup>229</sup> G Carlyle (ed), *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving in Five Volumes, Vol V* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865) 154, cited by Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 132.

atonement only, but the whole economy, everything that happens between God and his world."<sup>230</sup>

To invoke the imagery of priesthood and sacrifice returns to mind the three historic atonement metaphors of sacrifice, victory and justice. Each of these is discussed in some way relative to the two sets of key concepts described above that together offer an explication of the logic or mechanics of atonement.

But up until the last fifteen years or so ago, there had been previously a period of about twenty-five years when atonement was scarcely discussed at all, at least in terms of publications.<sup>231</sup> Where once had been 'an annual harvest' there became a famine; 'the flood declined to a trickle' represented almost exclusively by Dillistone's The Christian Understanding of Atonement. "Indeed, it has ... been argued, in the article by Colin Grant so entitled, that there has taken place 'The Abandonment of Atonement'. Other matters have taken priority, among them a preoccupation with Christianity's moral and social responsibilities."<sup>232</sup> Such a crisis in soteriological doctrine has been matched by a concomitant crisis for christology; the situation is well expressed by White:

... to require ... doctrine so specifically defined as to allow the eternal God and the historical man Jesus to share a common identity as the subject of the same ... experiences, and to promulgate this in the late twentieth century aftermath of idealism, empiricism, and positivism, invites ... great difficulties. Separately and cumulatively these intellectual fashions have formed a heady brew. It is easy to see why some deem the traditional doctrine ... to have been irredeemably poisoned by them.<sup>233</sup>

This 'heady brew' of intellectual thought can be understood alongside the dominant subjectivism that has characterised the modern period, as discussed above, and also in a sense meeting with the popular cult of the self and a do-your-own-thing ethical relativism emerging in the 1960's. Against a background of burgeoning non-realism and a rejection of an objective moral code, it is perhaps not surprising that Christianity came to focus on social and moral responsibilities.

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<sup>230</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 133.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.* xi.

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.* Gunton is here citing Colin Grant, 'The Abandonment of Atonement' King's Theological Review 9 (1986): 1-8.

<sup>233</sup> Vernon White, Atonement and Incarnation *op. cit.* 69.



While these various trends may be at odds with one another in some ways, they have contributed to a common consequence for theological method, expressed by Pannenberg as a change from 'from above' to 'from below'; "that is, instead of asking how the transcendent God could become man (or a man), we should ask how a man (Jesus) could show us God. They have also resulted in common (reductionist) conclusions."<sup>234</sup>

One of the most damaging critiques had come from the linguistic philosophy that was an heir to positivism. While Ayer<sup>235</sup> and the Vienna circle were rapidly seen to have scored too many own goals to get a result, the memory lingers on: an existentialist can be a positivist in disguise. The demythologisation project has come to fruition in Christian non-realism.<sup>236</sup> Don Cupitt offers an instructive summary of its outline:

Christian non-realism is the first full critical and entirely non-dogmatic style of religious thought to appear in the West. It has ... developed into something of a movement ... and arisen out of the way modern philosophy has developed since Kant, and out of the way theology has been developing since Rudolf Bultmann and the debate about demythologising the Gospel .... Non-realistic theists preserve all that is of specifically *religious* value in the idea of God. God ... is a guiding spiritual ideal, a symbol of the ultimate unity of our values, and a focus of spiritual aspiration ... but they cannot give any coherent account of ... God's objective existence.<sup>237</sup>

One wonders quite *how* that which is 'of specifically *religious* value' can be specified. Cupitt offers later a *résumé* of Jesus' Gospel message, which consists of four points. These can be summarised:

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<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> A J Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (1936; Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1971) . This is the seminal statement of Logical Positivism, which sought to demonstrate via its verification principle that metaphysical statements - those concerned with theology, ethics, aesthetics - were literally non-sense.

<sup>236</sup> For a seminal example, Don Cupitt, The Sea of Faith (London: BBC, 1984), and contributors to this discussion. The work of Anthony Freeman, David Hart, Stephen Mitchell are other examples, with contributions in Colin Crowder (ed) God and Reality: essays on Christian Non-Realism, (London: Mowbray, 1997). See also John Hick (ed) The Myth of God Incarnate (London: SCM, 1977), and contributors including Maurice Wiles, Michael Goulder *et al.*

<sup>237</sup> Don Cupitt, 'Free Christianity' in Colin Crowder (ed), *op. cit.* 14-25.

- (1) ... what would you do if you found yourself at the end of your world, and obliged to choose absolutely?
- (2) ... Jesus criticises the Temple, the religious professionals, tradition and externals. Like a Cynic, he is utterly indifferent to rank and hierarchy.
- (3) ... Jesus appears to have no theology of universal human sinfulness and the need for expiation. He speaks of God in a very restrained and oblique style ... He privatises or internalises God.
- (4) ... Jesus is uninterested in the sort of Grand Narrative religion that draws heavily upon the past for legitimation and on the future for vindication. He wants to concentrate all attention upon the here and now.<sup>238</sup>

This '*résumé*' speaks for itself in large measure. The stress is clear and concentrated on the human individual and his or her own moral choices. It fits squarely into the modern paradigm of individual subjectivism. What is curious, though, is quite how there can be such confidence that Jesus' mental state can be so readily accessed. (And even if it could, how could we possibly understand?) Surely this is a form of ethics rather than theology. And as such, does it not share the basic inadequacy of its forbear - Schleiermacher's category of God-consciousness? That is, an account of human being that neglects our creatureliness, that fails to understand human beings as individuated within a community of human beings, and as a part of a wider community of all of God's created things.

Rae<sup>239</sup> has responded with insight to the exponents of Christian non-realism, specifically the contributors to The Myth of God Incarnate, through a consideration of the meditations of Climacus. This has led him toward a shift in the way 'reason' might be understood, and it attempts to disinherit rationalism from effectively dictating the confines of what might be claimed as reasonable. What is a thought-experiment for Climacus - a letting-go of trust in human reason in order to embrace the gift of faith - is a Christian truth that entails a 'radical transformation of our understanding.' Christ is 'the cornerstone of a new understanding' that reinstates reason, 'not to a position of final authority' but as 'a new way of looking at the world.' Thus, "Christ may shape and transform us rather than letting our preconceptions determine what may be said of Jesus Christ."<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Murray Rae, 'The Status of Doctrine: Kierkegaardian Explorations', in Victor Pfitzner and Hilary Regan (eds), The Task of Theology Today (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 191-219. Climacus is a pseudonym for Kierkegaard.

<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*



God moves in mysterious ways. Postmodernity - far from being an obvious comrade for theology - has called into question the foundations of modernity. While modernity was characterised by rejection of tradition and a confidence in reason to provide the basis for truth, postmodernity is a valuable 'problematic' that invites key intellectual reappraisals. "[T]he question of postmodernity offers an opportunity to reappraise modernity, to read the signs of the times as indicators that modernity itself is unstable, unpredictable, and to forsake the foreclosed future that it once seemed to promise."<sup>241</sup> Despite the undoubtedly inhospitable aspects of certain strands of postmodern thought - its nihilism, its relativism, its ready embrace of the irrational - its stress on language as meaning-making is insightful. While clearly rejecting the postmodern claim that language is the most fundamental aspect of reality, what can be affirmed is the postmodern objection to the notion that only so-called literal language, or factual language, can convey truth; such a notion entails a much impoverished idea of truth. Now it has become common currency to accept that language is profoundly metaphorical in all intellectual enquiries. Clark offers a helpful illustration here:

The very ideas of literal meaning, and literal truth, are themselves so laced with metaphor as to allow an easy puzzle. If metaphorical utterances were not to be taken seriously, or judged 'really true' we should have to concede that literal utterance could not be true, or serious, either. For we have no informative analysis of what the truth of propositions rests in that is not metaphorical. If 'grass is green' is true upon occasion that is because the expression 'grass is green' mirrors, or represents, or calls to mind the grass's greenness. But all those paraphrases were metaphors. If they weren't really true, then neither is grass green.<sup>242</sup>

Metaphorical language is neither dispensable, deviant nor merely decorative language; rather it is 'ordinary', 'normal', 'reflective' and 'conceptualising' language<sup>243</sup> that can convey objective truths, and is present in all fields of intellectual inquiry. It is "models and the web of metaphor which they give rise to which commonly constitute the means by which to speak of transcendent, but

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<sup>241</sup> David Lyon, Postmodernity (Buckingham: OU, 1994) 70.

<sup>242</sup> Stephen Clark, How to Think about the Earth, *op. cit.* 138.

<sup>243</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought (NY: Basic Books, 1999). Also Mary Midgley, Science as Salvation: a modern myth and its meaning, (London: Routledge, 1992): "... intellectual enquiries ... all draw concepts, presuppositions and metaphors from outside their borders, items which can deeply affect their meaning." 2.



putatively real, entities and relations."<sup>244</sup> Such a repristinated critical realism is helpful in the "reappropriation of aspects of the Christian tradition which rationalist criticism has called radically into question."<sup>245</sup> Specifically here, it enables the atonement to be discussed in terms of a new way of being within the created order.

The last fifteen years have seen something of a return to prominence of theological writing that reiterates central Christian doctrine in some way, and atonement theory is no exception.<sup>246</sup> While "[L]iberal Christian theologians are embarrassed by all doctrines of the Atonement, (once a crucial feature of the Christian creed), save the exemplary,"<sup>247</sup> a more robust Christian theology is responding to those who would reduce it to existentialism and subjectivism by sifting the ethics. What seems clear now is that atonement is being understood integrally within a movement that encompasses incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection.

A significant thrust in some of this work has been the clear priority of bringing a trinitarian dynamic into the foreground, and thus to understand atonement in terms of relationships. This is particularly evident in Gunton, Fiddes and White; it is the intimacy of relationship with God that yields atonement which in turn points toward our participation in those relationships. Gunton and Fiddes are both examples of the reiteration of the atonement metaphors of sacrifice, victory and justice, which they re-construe in ways - each very differently - but in ways that are intelligible and meaningful now. White and Gunton in particular, also set out to defend the full constitutive claim of Christianity: to reiterate - that God's gift of salvation was *constituted* by Christ's action, not merely *illustrated* by it.

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<sup>244</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language (London: OUP, 1985) 123.

<sup>245</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 24.

<sup>246</sup> See work listed at n 2, (with the exception of Forsyth!); other examples are David Ford, Self and Salvation, *op. cit.*; Timothy Gorringer, God's Just Vengeance, *op. cit.*, which is a particular engagement with the relationship between atonement theory and penal strategies; Robert Letham, The Work of Christ *op. cit.*; Ulrich Simon, Atonement: From Holocaust to Paradise *op. cit.*, which explores the nature of atonement after the Holocaust through engagement with examples of evil in Literature; Richard Swinburne, Responsibility and Atonement, *op. cit.* for whom a prime concern is the philosophical coherence of atonement; S W Sykes (ed), Sacrifice and Redemption *op. cit.* a collection of essays that respond to the question - When Christians speak of the death of Christ as a sacrifice, what have they meant and what does it mean today? A notable example also is J Denny Weaver, The Nonviolent Atonement *op. cit.*, in which Weaver discusses atonement models, in particular *Christus Victor*, in relation to Black, Feminist and Womanist theologies. A suggestive and interesting engagement with the environment is Stephen Clark, How to Think about the Earth, *op. cit.*

<sup>247</sup> Stephen Clark, How to Think about the Earth, *op. cit.* 134.



A brief discussion of Gunton's Actuality of Atonement, will demonstrate how new and imaginative construals also fit firmly within the tradition. It will also serve to place the whole theoretical discussion above in some context. For Christian theology to be authentically itself, it cannot jettison its central doctrines, or it will become something else; "[T]hat which has been believed everywhere, always and by all, cannot be set aside without abandoning the community itself."<sup>248</sup> Gunton makes better this central point - stated by Vincent rather statically - developing it through a gardening metaphor, into a methodological shaper for constructive Christian theology :

... so far as the relations of dogma to theology are concerned, dogma is that which delimits the garden of theology, providing a space in which theologians may play freely and cultivate such plants as are cultivable in the space which is so defined ... But ... just as a garden is not a garden without some boundaries - or just as the created world is only what it is as a work of God because it is finite in space and time - so theology ceases to be Christian theology if it effectively ceases to remain true to its boundaries.<sup>249</sup>

For Gunton, the underlying fundamental question turns on the nature of God's trinitarian engagement with his creation: "the theology of atonement is ... the theology of God's redeeming involvement in the worst of our evil."<sup>250</sup> His atonement construal is strongly objective, though not unrelieved by subjective aspects; Gunton is highly sceptical of models that are *too* subjective in focus, and also he finds exemplarism inadequate.<sup>251</sup>

While Gunton affirms that scriptural witness holds God and Jesus as exemplars to imitate, nevertheless he points out that the Letter to the Hebrews introduces three reasons why exemplarist models fail. First, that passages of text are taken out of context, and second, that Jesus is an example because he is the incarnate Son enabled by the Holy Spirit to remain unfallen where human beings would fall. Thus his humanity is not all of a piece with our own, and the New Testament always places the person of Christ in the context of the redemption of all things. And third, there is also no treatment of Christ's person which does not make his

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<sup>248</sup> St Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium*, II, 3, cited John Macquarrie, *Principles*, *op. cit.* 12.

<sup>249</sup> Colin Gunton, 'Dogma, the Church and the Task of Theology' in Victor Pfitzner and Hilary Regan (eds), *The Task of Theology Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) 1-22.

<sup>250</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 201.

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.* 157ff.



death and resurrection pivotal and central to all reconciling action. The death of Christ must therefore be different from any other human death.

For Gunton, the decisive weakness of subjective accounts is that they trivialise evil. Human agency is inadequate for the task of restoration of its own good condition, for only God can achieve this. "What is required is a setting free, an act of recreation, of redemption, which yet respects the humanity of its object."<sup>252</sup> This statement shows clearly the objective emphasis, with a subjective thrust in the final clause.

Methodologically, Gunton is strongly scriptural in his basis, and the focus of his discussion is ecclesiological. In doing so, he seeks specifically to contend with various forms of rationalism handed down from Enlightenment traditions, which have contributed to the effect of undermining confidence in the traditional atonement metaphors of victory, justice and sacrifice (while simultaneously contributing to the favouring of subjective theories as a way of side-stepping rationalist critiques). The intention is "to find a rationality which, because it is not rationalist, has better claim to express the truth of the doctrine without detracting from the historical concreteness and fathomless depths of its object."<sup>253</sup>

Gunton restates the atonement metaphors to demonstrate their continuing validity and genuine meaningfulness about God's action in Christ. He argues the need to engage seriously with the nature of the church. Christ, as the mediator of creation, is related to all flesh, indeed to the whole order of creation; that is, to be part of creation means to be related to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. Enfleshment of the Son in the midst of time re-orders and renews the relationship, redirecting it to its original and eschatological destiny. Any concept of the cosmic Christ, his work in creation and redemption, is to be realised in a community existing in time and space.

"The church is called to be that midpoint ... and the place where the reconciliation of all things is from time to time anticipated."<sup>254</sup> Therefore Gunton works out his atonement theory through re-articulating traditional metaphors within the life of the church; not to deny an interest in the world outside, rather to be based where the atoning grace of God is acknowledged. Gunton applies the metaphor of

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<sup>252</sup> *ibid.* 160.

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.* 25. This is similar to Rae's point developed through Climacus: the attempt to disinherit rationalism from establishing the criteria and confines of what might be considered reasonable.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.* 140.



victory to overcoming the demonic, to preaching against slavery to the lie, against those 'lordless forces' consisting not only of technology without morality, but also the media-wrapped goodies that have become the idols of our time - for example, sport, fashion, and presumably the misuse of sex and drugs. Thus the church is part of the Gospel, not an instrument of salvation for the individual within: somehow a parable of the Kingdom, where through the Spirit, the literature of Scripture becomes constitutive of the life of the community, and where the Spirit uses the humanity of Jesus to realise God's Kingdom. Gunton commends the tradition of Dissent; the church must be both in, and for, and therefore sometimes against, the world. Thus the polity of the church must be shaped by Christ's victory on the Cross, and that victory must be appropriated in the cause of truth.

The metaphor of God's justice is restated as judgement and forgiveness, in the form of baptism, itself an acceptance of God's achievement in the work of Christ. (Gunton observes also the double forms of baptism, which symbolise cleansing of human life through the atoning sacrifice.) The question of the forgiveness of sins gives rise to a central problem within the church - its theology of baptism with its individualistic emphasis.

Gunton argues the need to understand sin existentially and relationally, that is, the whole person in relation to God and the rest of creation. One problem is a doctrine of original sin that is pegged to a chain of historical causality rather than seen as a breach of relationship with God: the vital link is lost between atonement and the living community in which it is actualised. Baptism brings about some ontological change, for if the church is a community ordered to God through Christ and in the Spirit, then baptism institutes a person into a new set of personal relationships, premised on the forgiveness of sins.

Gunton cautions against the wiping-out of sins too easily, for forgiveness is premised on acknowledgement which provides the basis for a new form of life, where atonement can be actualised. Forgiveness is therefore genuinely creative of human moral possibilities, and this transformational account is faithfully God's justice, for true reconciliation is to uphold the order of creation; "the primary task is not to organise the world, but to be within it as a particular way of being human..."<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> *ibid.* 193.

The object of Gunton's criticism remains the church and the way its worship serves to reinforce individualistic interpretations. Deficient ecclesiology returns him to the task of reshaping the conceptuality of communion, and to this end, he restates the sacrificial metaphor in its application to the Eucharist. God's trinitarian engagement is here discussed as the sacrifice of Jesus understood on two levels. First, the Son does the work of the Father in his sacrifice as the self-giving of God through the life, death and resurrection of the incarnate Son. Second, the Son's life represents all life as a concentrated offering of human life to the Father. "Jesus is thus, at once the realisation of the communion of creator with creature and of creature with creator."<sup>256</sup>

In the specific context of this study, this last point is particularly interesting. For it may be that it is the sacrificial metaphor that might be the most amenable to being 'pressed' or manipulated in some way to try to give expression to how redemption for all created things, human and non-human, is included in Christ's work of atonement.

By way of a brief comparison, Fiddes' theology is rather different. For him, the efficacy of Christ's work on the Cross is intimately linked to individual existentialist situations; it is the human predicament that imposes itself on any understanding of salvation. Fiddes' method is also to restate traditional atonement metaphors through categories of 'enabling' a range of positive responses. Thus sacrifice enables us to give of ourselves, justice promotes in us a spirit of penitence and responsibility to return to God; and victory aids our resistance against inclination to sin. These are underpinned by love enkindled in us by Christ's self-giving, and showing an acknowledged debt to Abelard.

This is clearly a more subjective account, though Fiddes wants to claim an essentially objective focus by introducing - prompted by Macquarrie - two new aspects to his subjective account.<sup>257</sup> These are first, the revelatory nature of the Cross opening up possibilities for authentic existence; and second, Christ's reconciling work carries on in the church, as the community seeks to return good for evil. The Cross is the focal point of grace, creating the capacity in us for love to be enkindled, thus enabling us to be free to transform ourselves. That is, it remains God's action as logically prior, and hence we are saved by the revelation of love;

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<sup>256</sup> *ibid.* 199.

<sup>257</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event*, *op. cit.* 136-7.



that is, the event of the Cross, in its particularity, is the heart of the reconciling community.

This seems not entirely convincing as an adequate account of objective atonement, despite protestations to the contrary and certain redeeming features: "... we may reply that atonement is still initiated by God if he *creates* the change in human attitudes."<sup>258</sup> Yet the account seems to suffer from some of the same inadequacies as has been demonstrated with subjective understandings: a lack of a sense of atonement as God's eschatological act, and of the nature of human creatureliness within a community of creation. Possible relationships of analogy in some way between the creator and all of his creatures are suggested by Fiddes, but ultimately his concerns seem anthropocentric rather than theocentric: a despoiled natural world understood as 'inflicting excessive damage' to human beings rather than as an offence to God and the disruption of God's relationships.

It is ... consistent with the picture of a free universe that all levels of nature have some capacity in their way to respond to, or resist, the urging of the Spirit of God. Since human personalities have emerged from the wider context of nature under the guidance of the Spirit of God, one would expect to find some family likeness throughout the whole ... we can envisage a relationship between God and his creation at every level, a bond which has some analogy to that between God and the human community. Thus we can conceive of the natural world as also having slipped away from the aims and harmony that God desires for it. From this 'groaning' of the universe in frustration ... excessive damage can be inflicted upon human life.<sup>259</sup>

What is clear, however, is that both Gunton's and Fiddes' accounts re-present atonement metaphors that are rooted in the tradition, and are thus 'historically important'; and that in their reconstructions, they show that these metaphors 'have not been superseded'.

The great atonement metaphors, because they have articulated and made real certain ways of inhabiting the world, continue to have currency even where they have become debased or dead metaphors (witness the many uses of *sacrifice* in modern English.) This may not be merely a matter

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<sup>258</sup> *ibid.* 139.

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.* 208.

of our cultural heritage, but of the fact that they bring uniquely to speech certain features of the human condition.<sup>260</sup>

Gunton also insists that an adequate understanding of atonement will be expressed through a combination of each of the three traditional metaphors rather than by concentrating on one to the neglect of others; though each will anyway overlap with aspects of the others because at heart they are fundamentally related. "Just as in the discussion of victory we found ourselves ineluctably led into the legal sphere, so ... Paul cannot teach justification without appealing also to the imagery of sacrifice ... Thus do the metaphors converge and combine as their users attempt to express the meaning of different aspects of the atonement."<sup>261</sup> Thus there is a certain logic that underpins the metaphors and integrates them in some way.

Ford<sup>262</sup> both agrees and disagrees with this. He affirms that the 'best doctrines of atonement' will both prioritise 'one approach as a distinctive way of articulating the essentials' while also simultaneously relating this to 'other valid ways so that these are not dismissed or ignored.' What he dislikes, methodologically, is a dispassionate, 'even-handed overview' approach, or a mere revelling 'in the richness and diversity' of the range of metaphorical expressions. Ford feels 'let down' by attempts to discuss atonement in terms of 'all the approaches without ever risking involvement in the depths of one of them'; doctrines of atonement 'need to have gripping power' in order to do justice to the 'definiteness, specificity and urgency of Christian salvation.' But is this suggestive of the 'for me' of existentialist accounts, perhaps?

Ford has a preference for 'taking a journey of intensification' to explore the possibilities of a particular idea that has 'gripping power.' This is, for him, the metaphor of the 'Face of Christ' which he has found to be a veritable battery of fruitful symbols.<sup>263</sup> For the purposes of this study, one particular observation is interesting:

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<sup>260</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality op. cit.* 50. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology op. cit.* discusses thirteen models and considers that each of these remains viable. These are: ransom, redemption, salvation, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, atonement, reconciliation, the classic idea (victory), penalty/punishment, satisfaction, exemplar, liberation. 29ff. A lengthy list, and McIntyre considers each of these to be 'biblical'.

<sup>261</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality op. cit.* 105.

<sup>262</sup> David Ford, 'The Face on the Cross' *op. cit.* 215-25.

<sup>263</sup> David Ford has developed this further in his *Self and Salvation, op. cit.* 191-215.



It (The Face of Christ) can also be developed to connect with other ways of talking about atonement: sacrifice in relation to the worship, presence and favour of God; justification as being able to stand forgiven before 'the judge judged in our place'; military confrontation, conflict and death; interpersonal reconciliation; satisfaction in Anselm as relying on a praise-centred notion of the honour of God and what spoils joy before God; the light of salvation as focused through a particular face; the physicality and bodiliness of a salvation that takes up the whole of creation, gloriously embodying it in a transfigured face - transformed matter!<sup>264</sup>

Here Ford puts his finger on what is the particular interest of this study: how to understand the redemption of nature, of all of God's created beings - each with a God-given purpose and a good-of-its-own. The ways of discussing atonement are not fixed, for no theological doctrine is ever closed or final; as Gunton indicated, theologians may play and cultivate new plants in the garden, within the boundaries that render its definition as a garden. Ford's 'Face of Christ' metaphor is *de facto* testimony to that openness. To reiterate Bowker, "[T]heories of atonement are somewhat like lymphocytes in the body: they are solutions going around looking for a problem, and taking the shape of a problem as it is identified."<sup>265</sup> The problem is the ecological situation, but might a solution perhaps (re)shape the problem?

Ford argues, "...there is wisdom in the search for an image or field of imagery that is pivotal, that can help give an imaginative as well as conceptual integration and that can have special relevance in our context."<sup>266</sup> Our context is the environmental crisis: the search is for 'an image or field of imagery' that can give expression to the redemption of all things.

There are resources in scripture<sup>267</sup> and tradition<sup>268</sup> that indicate God's universal salvific concerns for all of God's creation. Yet soteriological theory has historically

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<sup>264</sup> David Ford, 'The Face on the Cross' *op. cit.* 220.

<sup>265</sup> John Bowker, The Meanings of Death, *op. cit.* 97.

<sup>266</sup> David Ford, 'The Face on the Cross' *op. cit.* 216.

<sup>267</sup> For example, in the first creation narrative, God names his creatures each according to their kind: the Divine naming is a blessing and an assigning to a purpose, Gen 1: 20-4; Eph. 1:10; Rom 8:20ff. Ernest Lucas offers a helpful and thorough survey of New Testament teaching relevant to the environment, and he concludes that the New Testament is clear that God is concerned with the renewing of the whole of creation, that Jesus' announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God has ecological implications and that the redemptive work of Jesus plays a vital role. 'The New Testament teaching on the environment', Transformation 16:3 (1999) 93-99. H Paul Santmire elicits the ecological motifs in both Old and New Testaments in his The Travail of Nature (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985) pp 190-210. He links the apocalyptic proclamation of Jesus and the apocalyptic theology of Paul with the renewal of the whole creation, and draws on Ephesians and Colossians in discussing the cosmic lordship of Christ.

not offered any full account of this. There are clear expressions in the discussions of Gunton and McIntyre, and some indication in Fiddes. White comments that his own work in Atonement and Incarnation 'has not properly dealt with God's purposes for *all* things (*ta panta*)', pleading that this reflects 'a limited scope for a short book'; but he also makes the clear statement that

... it should be granted that any comprehensive doctrine of redemption should also include some account of how all things are reconciled .... The universal scope of Christ's work need not be limited to humankind ... We could, for instance, propose that God 'must' have entered into a perfect human experience of the natural order as a constitutive necessity in its redemption, in an analogous sense to his redemption of the human world. For if we grant that the proper meaning and purpose of a tree or hill, the lilies of the field or the birds of the air, depends on a total web of right relations and right perceptions within the whole world, including the human world, then we may grant the incarnation role in creating the possibility of *those* right perceptions and right relations (as well as interpersonal relations).<sup>269</sup>

The problem - the lack of soteriological discussion that is concerned with all creation - is surely due more to movements in cultural and intellectual history than to deficient theological resources. Theology is in some measure shaped by context: atonement theories are culturally conditioned and mediated.

The ecological crisis is integral to the wider secularity crisis; it is a consequence of the configuration of nature as object which has diminished the sense of the sacred in nature. It is a problem of modernity. The characteristic influences for theology in modernity, have been, first, the demolition of metaphysical realism by Kant in

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<sup>268</sup> For example, Athanasius, see n 15, n 16 above/ch 1 n 10; Irenaeus, see n 68 above; Augustine on Rom 1:20 - "I asked the whole mass of the universe about my God, and it replied, 'I am not God, God is he who made me.'" Confessions 10.6; David Yeago has found Maximus the Confessor a most helpful dialogue partner for reflection on cosmic redemption. Accepting that such reflection is a 'fragmentary and provisional enterprise', he finds that Maximus 'presents cosmos and scripture as objective economies of divine revelations that stand in a perfect analogous relation to the Logos-Revealer .... The cosmos, then, is a sort of bible, and the bible is a cosmos, each at once concealing and revealing the Logos, who for Maximus is never anyone else than the incarnate Jesus Christ .... Thus for Maximus, reflection on cosmos and Christ is a kataphatic enterprise of the apophatically-disciplined believing imagination, seeking to comprehend created things as embraced by the divine intention whose single objective is the particularity of Jesus Christ and the newness that makes its appearance in his concrete reality.' As Yeago also points out - 'the problem ... is what might be called the problem of *connection*.' Indeed so. 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St Maximus The Confessor', Modern Theology 12/2 (1996): 163-93.

<sup>269</sup> Vernon White, Atonement and Incarnation *op. cit.* 108.



the late 18th century, and the turn to the stress on the subject in the nineteenth century.

As has been discussed, the subjective stress has held sway up until the latter part of the twentieth century: traditional Christian doctrine has been called into question - the Trinity, christology and soteriology, eschatology. But it is precisely in these terms that an account of universal salvation must be expressed: an objective account that is the action of the triune God and understood eschatologically. "Christology universalises: but the universal salvation must then take concrete shape in particular parts of the creation ... It is the function of God the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, to *particularise* the universal redemption in anticipation of the eschatological redemption."<sup>270</sup>

To construe the redemption of nature requires an objective account; but much ecotheology has taken a rather different approach. A subjective account, premised on response, collapses the distinction between revelation and redemption. Chapter 1 discussed the nature of the theological response to the ecological crisis. This response was found, in very large measure, to fit firmly within the tradition of modernity. By 'buying into' the modern paradigm, ecotheology has cut from beneath its own feet, the theological ground required to express adequately the redemption of nature. It has only one move: exemplarism.

Larry Rasmussen's account sets out to discuss 'The Theology of the Cross ' in ecological terms, but seems to be invoking the cross as an epistemological principle, and yields the following:

The way of the cross as the ethic of the human Jesus fastens ... on that which negates and threatens the life of creation .... any power that does not go to the places where community and creation are most obviously ruptured and ruined is no power for healing at all .... The only power that can truly heal and keep the creation is power instinctively drawn to the flawed places of existence, there to call forth from the desperate and needy themselves extraordinary yet common powers that they did not even know they had. This is the power seen in Jesus .... Whence the power for this? As a panentheistic ethic, cross theology, like much feminist theology and creation theology, says, 'In creation itself, where God is'. A power is present in the cosmos and it is

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<sup>270</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement* *op. cit.* 170.

sufficient for the redemption of all things ... we are coparticipants, together with all else 'in heaven and earth.'<sup>271</sup>

Sallie McFague's<sup>272</sup> more recent work of ecological theology shows the hallmarks of the influences she acknowledges: process philosophy and feminist epistemology. It concludes with an ethic of care, *via* discussion that seeks to replace the 'arrogant eye - knowing nature as object' with the 'loving eye - knowing nature as subject'. Clearly this is valuable and helpful in terms of ecological ethics. But this particular work was written partly as a response to criticism that her earlier ecotheology was so dominated by an unrelieved Process view that it was not really Christian. McFague says in her introduction, a 'theologian's job is to help Christians think about God, other people - and nature - so .... how *are* Christians to love nature?'

But apart from a liberal sprinkling of the words Christ, Christian, Christians and Christianity, this is in effect, more of the same: her desire to be ecumenical and her relentless acquiescence in 'relevance' - theology 'for our time' - to the detriment of 'distinctiveness'. For example, on nature: "... a tree is not just a tree: it is the Tree of Life, so many board feet, shade for a weary traveler, a symbol of longevity, a thing of beauty, the cross of Christ, the delights of a tree house, Augustine's famous pear tree, the icon of the environmental movement, and so on ..."<sup>273</sup> McFague's working assumptions are bereft of the requisite theological tools to construe an adequate account of atonement that might embrace all nature. An example, of which there is much more:

Thus, in a time of the earth's deterioration, Jesus' radical inclusive love ought to embrace the earth others who are suffering bodily oppression .... A *Christian* nature spirituality ... extends the paradigm of the destabilizing radical love we see in Jesus' parables, healing stories, and eating practices *to nature* .... It is what Christian praxis demands ... commitment to the God of Jesus Christ demands it.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Larry Rasmussen, "Returning to Our Senses: The Theology of the Cross as a Theology for Eco-Justice," in Dieter Hessel (ed) After Nature's Revolt: Eco-justice and Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 40-56.

<sup>272</sup> Sallie McFague Super, Natural Christians: how we should love nature (London: SCM, 1997).

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.* 7

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.* 12ff.



Although she would surely not wish to own it, this seems to be essentially anthropocentric: the declared arch-enemy of the ecologically aware. Maybe there is some inherent relation between exemplarism and negative forms of anthropocentrism?

As it emerged at the end of Chapter 1, again Moltmann proves to be one of an exceptional and particular type. For as will later be shown, Moltmann maintains, in his ecologically-oriented work, an account of atonement that is objective, as well as a trinitarian understanding of God, and continues to hold his seminal maxim that eschatology is the ground of all theology. Employing the language of glorification, and the mediating bridge concepts of assumption and incorporation, here is an example from Moltmann: in The Way of Jesus Christ, he writes:

The perfecting of the whole creation, extended over time in the creation process, is only achieved *eschatologically*...What is eschatological is the bringing back of all things out of their past, and the gathering of them into the kingdom of glory. What is eschatological is the raising of the body and the whole of nature...To put it simply: God forgets nothing he has created. Nothing is lost to him. He will restore it all....For cosmic christology this means that it is only the reconciliation of all things, whether on earth or in heaven (Col. 1.20), and their redemption from the fetters of transience of the times which leads to the gathering together of all things in the messiah, and therefore to the completion of creation.<sup>275</sup>

Moltmann's ecological theology remains in the garden of theology, and he remains a theologian of the Cross. The ways in which Moltmann grounds christologically his ecological soteriology will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>275</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 303-4. The influence of Athanasius is clear: 'it was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by him should be brought to nothing.' *De Inc. VI. op. cit.*

### Chapter 3: The Cultural Background and Christological Grounding of Jürgen Moltmann's Ecological Soteriology

Jürgen Moltmann is among the most influential of the living and writing Protestant theologians.<sup>276</sup> For nearly forty years he has written theology under the general rubric of 'political theology', which is, for him, an attempt to respond positively to the various challenges wrought by modernity. From the outset, modernity has been characterised by developments in the market economy, in science, technology, industrialisation, urbanisation and the nature and structure of the burgeoning nation state. From their beginnings in the sixteenth century, these developments gathered apace and together came to a head in the nineteenth century. With some prescience, the historian Thomas Carlyle wrote in an article entitled 'Signs of the Times': "[W]ere we required to characterise this age by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral age, but above all others, the Mechanical Age ... which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us ... Our true Deity is Mechanism. It has subdued external Nature for us, and, we think it will do other things."<sup>277</sup> Alongside these developments there arose new political ideologies in late modernity: liberalism and socialism, with their common faith in progress and politics, carried with them the belief that they had become the way - the secular way - consciously to shape the future.

Since the onset of the modern period in the sixteenth century, secularisation has been a long-term movement in which the church has come to lose its central role established over the previous fifteen centuries. Clearly it is debatable whether it can be claimed that modern history began in the sixteenth century. Certainly in socio-economic terms, periodisation is best avoided.<sup>278</sup> But in religio-political

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<sup>276</sup> Richard Bauckham suggests that Moltmann is the most influential in *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1987)1, and reiterates it in his later *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995)1; this is mooted also by Arne Rasmussen in his *Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1995)15-6. And, for Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and The Power*, (London: SCM, 2000), Moltmann is "the most important German-speaking Protestant theologian since the Second World War." 12.

<sup>277</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Edinburgh Review*, lix (1829): 439-59. Cited by Roy Porter, 'Visions of Unsullied Bliss', in Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman (eds.), *Fins de Siècle* (London: Yale University Press, 1996) 152.

<sup>278</sup> In his essay entitled 'Socio-economic revolution in England', MacFarlane argues both against strict temporal and also subject specialisation insofar as these compartmentalise and feed too readily into a 'revolutionary' interpretation. He cites this as a reason for the diversity between



terms, the onset of modern history can be traced very clearly to the sixteenth century. Radical religious changes took place. Reforming ideas had existed previously and the Church as an institution had undergone phases of renewal and decay on a cyclical basis, as dissatisfaction with the status quo served to critique excesses and shored up reforming practices. But Renaissance humanist learning raised expectations which, in a new political climate, informed movements for change which became increasingly divergent leading to Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Denominationalism was ultimately to contribute to secularism.<sup>279</sup> Secular humanism thus came to be, in some measure, the creation of a certain dualistic theology: the autonomous individual of the Enlightenment invented first by theologians.

The rise of the nation state was a characteristic of the sixteenth century and crucial to the development of secular hegemony; implicit was the decline of the two great international institutions, the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy. This tore the seamless web of Christendom which gave way to the concept of Europe. One of the specific features of medieval thought was the dominant position of Christian theology; the emergence of Europe as a living concept was a clear sign of acceptance that this Christian dominance was no longer practical politics.<sup>280</sup> The sixteenth century was a time of so-called religious wars, but these conflicts often masked essentially material designs with attempts by diverse groups to take a share of power. Christianity had been an expression of political force since the fourth century, but Christians mutually opposed, ostensibly in the name of Christ, was a new phenomenon which was to continue. "The Reformation and the Renaissance had between them shattered the medieval synthesis ... modern history can be interpreted as the story of the tension between the two."<sup>281</sup>

The preservation of the nation state gave rise to new techniques of diplomacy, while its dynastic orientation called for armies for its protection and perpetuation.

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historians as to the timing of the prime period of social change: hence RH Tawney, Christopher Hill and Lawrence Stone argue for the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, reflecting their own specialism as the crucial determinant in socio-economic change. Alan MacFarlane, in Roy Porter and Miklas Teich (eds.), Revolution in History, (Cambridge: CUP, 1986.)

<sup>279</sup> Henri de Lubac, Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man (London: Chapman, 1950).

<sup>280</sup> Denys Hay, Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (London: Longman, 1966) 397.

<sup>281</sup> VHH Green, Renaissance and Reformation (London: Arnold, 1964) 28. Surely a rather partial truth from Green here. It could be claimed that both modern and medieval history can be otherwise interpreted as the story of the tension between Christianity (in its various forms, including post-Christian culture) and Islam. But his point - in its partiality - stands in this context.



This was a significant, costly development which clearly had moral implications: another move to a dominantly secular polity. Internally the nation state required a bureaucracy to handle the centralised power, and, in spite of Renaissance humanist learning which was grounded in Christian tradition, power grabbing was a major motivation for the 'Renaissance Princes': included in this category were Henry VIII, The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Francis I, Philip II, any Pope of the time, and also Elizabeth I, (despite her gender: not a feminist point here, merely an observation that a Renaissance Prince could be a woman!). Art is socially significant and can be used to demonstrate the shifting patterns of authority. In the medieval period, religious themes were dominant in art: cathedrals were built to the glory of God, painters focused on Christ, the Madonna and the Saints. Come the Renaissance, princes built palaces to their own praise, and commissioned artists to portray the merits, virtues, wealth and power of their patrons.<sup>282</sup>

The development of secular hegemony has been profound and all-pervasive. This can be demonstrated most readily in the eclipsing of theistic moral norms in political statecraft. "By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the concept of the State ... had come to be regarded as the most important object of analysis in European political thought ... the foundations of the modern idea of politics as the study of statecraft had been firmly laid."<sup>283</sup> They were laid by Machiavelli, the most notable prophet of the secular and the pragmatic,<sup>284</sup> whose work represented the culmination of political theorising since the thirteenth century religious humanists. At that time, Marsilius of Padua recovered the Aristotelian idea of the autonomous state, lost under the Augustinian influence of the suppression of any

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<sup>282</sup> This practice of patronage and clientage is well accounted for in The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, Transl. George Bull, (London: Penguin, 1956.) See also Hugh Trevor-Roper, Renaissance Essays, (London: Fontana, 1985.) Of great interest is the discussion of Holbein in John Carroll, Humanism: the Wreck of Western Culture, (London: Fontana, 1993.) Ch. 3: "Holbein had been a mere twenty-five years old when in 1522 he painted his *Christ Entombed*. On that occasion he had stood himself in humanist's shoes and with a brilliant intuition had seen the new culture's necessary first step, if it were to establish itself. It had to kill Christ...Holbein kills Christ by demolishing the crucifixion. His Christ is no more than a dead body....In 1522 Holbein plotted humanism's first step, to destroy the authority of Christianity, to clear the cultural decks. Over the next three hundred years the destruction would work its fill. In 1533 he asked the second question: with what shall we replace Christ crucified? There was no problem for him about the answer: freewill and reason." 33-4. (Given there is no picture here of Holbein's *Christ Entombed*, a brief description: a horizontal painting of a dead body, that is Christ's dead body, lying flat on his back. But there is no hint that he is different in any way to any dead man; there is no cross, and nothing points towards resurrection. He is just dead, deceased, no more.)

<sup>283</sup> Quentin Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol II (Cambridge: CUP, 1978) 345.

<sup>284</sup> See Trevor-Roper's discussion of Machiavelli as the antithesis to Plato in Renaissance Essays, *op. cit.* 51-4.



notion of church subordination. The ground for Machiavelli was prepared therefore by religious Renaissance humanist scholarship and also by the dissemination of Italian ideas in the fifteenth century. North Europeans came to study in Italy and mostly they returned to teach in their own countries: "the outcome of these interactions was the emergence of a new and self-confident humanist culture in France, England and Germany by the beginning of the sixteenth century."<sup>285</sup>

Skinner describes how the theory of the later Renaissance humanists presented a sharp change in focus, though much contributed to well-established tradition. They continued to draw on the same values: the hero was still the virtuous man. There was continuity in their analysis of the capricious power of fortune, and the strength of virtue to overcome malice; Machiavelli endorsed these. They continued to stress education; Machiavelli did not reiterate this. The changing character of the audiences brought new elements from the later humanists. Earlier humanism saw the main purpose of government as the preservation of the Christian values of liberty and justice; later humanists, including Machiavelli, reintroduced the defenders of despotic regimes, with the aim of maintaining peace and security rather than upholding liberty and justice. Importantly they redefined the key concept of virtue in two ways: first, they reiterated Aristotle's differentiation between virtue in the Prince against virtue in the citizen, with which Machiavelli agreed. Second, they synthesised a range of moral qualities including Christian and cardinal virtues with those of liberality, magnificence, generosity and clemency; Machiavelli dissociated himself from this. Machiavellian influences have been far reaching in their marginalisation of Christian norms in political theory.

Central to Machiavelli's own innovations was a practical realism: he was the first to articulate and publish what he observed already existed as a means to success. At heart, his message redefined the concept of the role of virtue and its meaning such as to distance it totally from God. His treatises - The Prince and Discourses - signify the outset of the modern stage in the development of political thought.<sup>286</sup> He stressed that nothing mattered more than the maintenance of appearances; while it was necessary for the Prince always to appear conventionally virtuous, it

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<sup>285</sup> Quentin Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol I (Cambridge: CUP, 1978) 197. For the influence of Italian educated courtiers as prime movers in the Henrician reformation - eg. Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Starkey - see any of David Starkey's Tudor studies, eg. The Reign of Henry VIII (London: Collins and Brown, 1991).

<sup>286</sup> Felix Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence (Princeton: University Press, 1965) 153.

was usually impossible actually to behave so. He undermined all other theories in his illustration of the core of his argument, which was that "the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction."<sup>287</sup> In fairness to Machiavelli, what is clear here is not that he endorsed non-virtuous behaviour from any moral perspective. He was not a moralist, rather he described what he actually observed as the only way to rule successfully: an early version of the fact:value dichotomy. In so doing, of course, he undermined every Christian moral norm by marking it out as politically naive and doomed to failure as statecraft.

As Skinner goes on to describe, in discussing the concept of Republican liberty he took a heterodox stance at two key points. First, he defended civil discord because intense political involvement is virtuous, *per se*; secondly, the pursuit of virtue was patriotism, which could rarely be reconciled with justice and involved a repudiation of Christian values as allegiance to the State took priority over love of God. He stressed the role of force derived from Marsilius, and gave it great polemical emphasis. Machiavelli's treatises were not well received at first, due mainly to their more shocking qualities: their dismissal of God from the (political) scene and their complete disregard for Christian moral norms. But nevertheless it is also clear that despite any misgivings expressed and tensions felt because of an overriding belief in God's will, leading contemporary political theorists such as Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon derived much from Machiavelli, and acknowledged a debt to him.<sup>288</sup> What was so appealing to them in Machiavelli was, *inter alia*, the way effectively he ignored the traditional focus of authority - the repudiation of the authority of classical antiquity to serve as any model for the present.

Machiavellian theory was taken up systematically first of all in France. The French wars of religion were a succession of bloody conflicts running from 1562 to 1598, when irresolvable religious deadlock contributed to an upsurge of radical scepticism. Key political thinkers, notably Bodin (1530-96), had developed a vision of politics built essentially on a non-Christian basis, and it was this thinking - of the *politiques* rather than the religious factions - that was to shape the settlement. Central to Bodin's thought was the pre-supposition that political

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<sup>287</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol I*, *op. cit.* 133.

<sup>288</sup> Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) 73. Raab has studied the reception in England of Machiavelli's political writings.



society exists solely for political purposes.<sup>289</sup> The important pre-conditions derived directly from Machiavelli. These were (a) that politics should be a distinct branch of moral philosophy concerned with the art of government; (b) that the independence of each State from any external power must be assured, and (c) that the supreme authority within each State should be unrivalled in its own territories as a law-making power and object of allegiance. "With this analysis of the State as an omnipotent yet impersonal power, we enter the modern world."<sup>290</sup>

The purpose of this extended discussion about the onset of secularisation has been to demonstrate the profoundly deep-rooted and thoroughgoing nature of the secular cultural context that has become modernity and late modernity. While the sixteenth century was the harvest time of political thought, it was the seed time of the secular worldview. The task for Christian theology in general and for Jürgen Moltmann here in particular is greater, then, than any acknowledgement of the role that Christianity, in denominationalism, has played in contributing to the secular result; and indeed greater than any acknowledgement that Christianity has served historically to legitimate certain scientific and technological developments that have had deleterious effects for the environment. Furthermore, it is greater than recognising the challenge to theism of Enlightenment rationalism that brought belief in God to the bar of reason and found it wanting. This latter may well be, in historical terms, the prime cause of atheism, but the various enabling causes of the development of secular hegemony pre-date this by up to two hundred years. In some measure these can be summed up in the terms ideology and propaganda. Politics are values connected to power: the power of the ruling material force in society, which is simultaneously the ruling intellectual force, and hence secular ideas hold sway in the modern and late modern world.

Thus, from the highly visible, influential public form achieved progressively up to the early modern period, Christianity has been increasingly marginalised: the sixteenth century was the thin end of the wedge. Squeezed by seventeenth century scientific developments,<sup>291</sup> and squeezed even further by eighteenth century rationalism - by the nineteenth century, Christian practice had, in a marked sense, been forced into the private sphere, as the individual piety of the autonomous moral subject. But Christianity's relevance and distinctiveness reside in its critical stance relative to the status quo. Christian tradition embodies more than two

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<sup>289</sup> DR Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 135.

<sup>290</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol II*, *op. cit.* 358.

<sup>291</sup> See, for example, Dee Carter, 'Unholy Alliances: Religion, Science and Environment,' *op. cit.*; also Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning*, *op.cit.*

thousand years of revelation and insight, reflection on which offers a language with diverse possibilities in its grammar and vocabulary to help express crucial realities about what human being and community might mean in this world.

The theological response from Moltmann to the conditions of the modern world has emerged as strongly contextual: theology for him is more than just a theoretical enterprise, but rather it participates in the struggle for justice and righteousness against suffering and oppression, and thus it must necessarily take a stance in support of those who are victims, lost and excluded. Of his own work, he writes that "theology for me has never been a neutral scientific study or an objective doctrine, but an existential experience, which must be personally suffered, digested and understood."<sup>292</sup> For Moltmann, theological work transcends the particularity of internal discourse within the academy; for him, the insights of others - both theistic and positively atheistic - contribute to the sources of theology, and are the very stuff and matter of theological reflection:

For me, theology has come alive not so much in particular 'schools' like the 'Barth school', the 'Rahner school' and others of the past generation, as in movements, dialogues and conflicts. In those 'schools', the elements of the masters' thought was developed further. In the movements and dialogues of our generation we opened ourselves up towards others - strangers and often even hostile adversaries -, experienced our limitations, became aware of new problems and had to struggle for answers for which there was no basis in tradition.<sup>293</sup>

As such Moltmann's theology is essentially non-foundational: rather its identity can be construed as an attempt at participation within an ongoing and necessarily disputatious conversation taking place in modern society, which he would understand more likely in eschatological terms as coming-to-be civilisation. In the first of his programmatic writings,<sup>294</sup> Moltmann established one of the major keys

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<sup>292</sup> Jürgen Moltmann in 'Foreword' to Bauckham, Moltmann: Messianic Theology, vii. One would want to question anyway the possibility of any so-called neutral, objective study, but he makes his point nonetheless.

<sup>293</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, History and the Triune God, (London: SCM, 1991) 176. The 'movements and dialogues' to which he refers are essentially, from 1965, the Christian-Marxist dialogue which included his own engagement with Ernst Bloch, the ecumenical dialogue in the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches in which he has been involved since 1963, and also Jewish-Christian dialogue where he has been active since 1976.

<sup>294</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, (London: SCM, 1967). Moltmann has consistently maintained the eschatological nature of theology, though tending to prefer the term 'advent' to 'future': while the future offers a 'new pattern of transcendence', this must be a 'desirable future' that will challenge the socio-political structures of the status quo, and thus stand in a critical



of his theology: that eschatology defines the whole theological field. As the doctrine of Christian hope and witness to the God of hope:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.<sup>295</sup>

Eschatology for Moltmann is defined by God's promise in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is expressed in messianic mission. Moltmann develops Ernst Bloch's 'ontology of the not yet': "promise announces the coming of a *not yet* existing reality from the future of the truth."<sup>296</sup> The 'truth' is the truth of the resurrection,<sup>297</sup> the future of Jesus Christ which - for Moltmann here - is the only mode of possibility of the new creation. Moltmann understands the Christian tradition itself as an open-ended conversation, which is therefore revisable alongside new insights, experience and knowledge. Concerned with the whole of reality, it must necessarily engage with other knowledge claims, in some form of interpretation or assimilation. Moltmann's methodological claim that every "theology has to enter into the changing conditions of the culture in which it is pursued, perceiving and developing its own concern in these conditions"<sup>298</sup> is the maxim that can be followed throughout Moltmann's approach to constructive theology.

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relation to society rather than shore up its structures, The Future of Creation, 9-12. The 'desirable' nature of such a future, as opposed to merely a 'predictable' future is expressed by Moltmann in his use of 'advent' - *adventus* rather than *futurum*, 29-31; cf. The Way of Jesus Christ *op. cit.* 317-8; The Coming of God, *op. cit.* 25-6. Another distinction he makes is that Christian hope concerns a 'desirable' future, rather than a 'calculable' future, The Future of Creation, *op. cit.* 55; also the difference between 'eschatological extrapolation' and 'eschatological anticipation', *ibid.* 41-8, and Theology of Hope, *op. cit.* 15-36.

<sup>295</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, *op. cit.* 15f.

<sup>296</sup> *ibid.* 85.

<sup>297</sup> Moltmann received criticism for stressing the resurrection such as to seem to be neglectful of the cross. His second 'programmatic writing', The Crucified God *op. cit.* provided a kind of corrective to this perceived one-sided stress on Resurrection by concentrating on Christ's redeeming work on the Cross. Particular aspects of this will be discussed later.

<sup>298</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 64. Moltmann has made similar statements in other published writings, including, for example, Theology of Hope *op. cit.* 182, and The Future of Creation, *op. cit.* 35.



Thus, Moltmann construes his work as set within the context of contemporary life, and so he wants to play a part in dialogue and conflict with a view to contributing to the healing of everything in church, culture and creation. And this kind of praxis-orientation has specific content for Moltmann: as he puts it - giving a clue to the touchstone of his theology - "[T]he concept of 'praxis' should not be too narrowly defined, as if it dealt with only the active side of human endeavour. The passive experiences, which we call suffering, are also a part of the praxis of life."<sup>299</sup> In the second of his 'programmatic writings', he had established 'suffering' as the prime key to his theology; for example, "[C]hristian theology finds its relevance in hope, thought out in depth and put into practice, in the kingdom of the crucified Christ, by suffering in the 'sufferings of this present time', and makes the groaning of the creation in travail its own cry for God and for freedom."<sup>300</sup>

One aspect of the suffering of church, culture and creation that is the focus of Moltmann's attention is the ecological crisis; as he says, the "deadly fear men and women are experiencing is fear of nuclear catastrophe in the present, and ecological catastrophe in the future, and the conflicts in social and economic life which are the result of both."<sup>301</sup> Moltmann has continually stressed the gravity of the situation: *e.g.* "[W]hat we call the environmental crisis is ... nothing less than ... a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and so irreversible that it can not unjustly be described as apocalyptic. It is not a temporary crisis ... it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth."<sup>302</sup> The ecological crisis is a crisis of modernity, of the secular world in which the development of humans as social beings has not been commensurate with developments in technology. As an aspect of the broader secularity crisis, it participates in the disturbing picture of secular hegemony with its concomitant dysfunctional socio-political effects.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Passion of Christ and the Suffering of God," *op.cit.* 26. He connects further this understanding of praxis as not 'too narrowly defined' by linking action with meditation and contemplation as precisely redemptive, leading ultimately to *theosis*: "[A]ction led us to meditation. Meditation on the history of Christ for us led us to contemplation of the presence of his Spirit in us, and to the restoration of ourselves as God's image." *The Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.* 208.

<sup>300</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 24.

<sup>301</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* *op. cit.* 45.

<sup>302</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* xi. Cf. "The theme of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches is a prayer. It is a cry from the despair of death and a breath of the Spirit from this threatened creation, which is hungry for life." Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, *op. cit.* 70.

<sup>303</sup> Dee Carter, 'Unholy Alliances: Religion, Science and Environment', *op. cit.* See also Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), "...after about 150 years of secular decline, barbarism has been on the increase for most of the twentieth century, and there is no sign that this increase is at an end." 253. Fifty years ahead of Hobsbawm's observation - in 1947 - Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno had noted the seeming contradiction that the concept of human rights and dignity as the foundation of western humanism had failed to inhibit inhumane



The social development of human beings has been truncated by the particular account of human nature bequeathed by the Enlightenment: an inadequate anthropology of the human person as "rational-individualist calculator, whose only authoritative knowledge is that modelled on the natural sciences, positivistically conceived."<sup>304</sup> It is precisely this reductionist account of the person that seminal environmental critics have specified in their analyses of the causal factors of the ecological crisis.<sup>305</sup> Apart from its scientific definition and social science connotations, the term 'ecology' now carries a particular freight which invokes the notion that from the late twentieth century, science has developed a very different image of the world in contrast to the worldview that was the product of the optimistic science of the nineteenth century, characterised by a belief in progress and bourgeois improvement. 'Ecology' evokes now a quasi-political reference involving debates about the need for moral and practical limitations on scientific enquiry: issues that have not been seriously considered since the demise of theological hegemony.<sup>306</sup>

Moltmann is only too aware of 'twentieth century barbarisms', to borrow Hobsbawm's phrase, and his own personal experiences have always influenced and shaped his theological thought with its political commitments. He reflects on the ecological situation as a product of a human crisis of identity and alienation: theologically, a product of human sin which calls for repentance and cries out for redemption.

From the very beginning, the intention of the methodological experience of nature was that nature should be appropriated by human beings for human use. Today this has led to the irreversible 'end of nature' - at least the nature accessible to human beings. All that is left is human environment and technological nature. In the mass cities, human beings encounter only their own products. If

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behaviour, and asked "why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." Dialectic of Enlightenment 1947 (London: Allen Lane, 1973) xi. Moltmann would no doubt have been aware of their observation. The apparent contradiction is not so contradictory if the secular is itself understood as an underlying cause of the problem.

<sup>304</sup> Robin Grove-White, "The 'Christian Person' and Environmental Concern," Studies in Christian Ethics 5/2 (1992): 1-17.

<sup>305</sup> For example, the analyses of Fritjof Capra, Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich and Fritz Schumacher have observed the influential presence of the 'reductionist-calculator' model of human being in the promotion of insensitive technological developments with deleterious environmental consequences actively involved in, *inter alia*, multi-national corporations, large agricultural systems, energy systems. Cited by Grove-White, *op. cit.*, who notes further with some dismay that this is also the model of the person that is frequently invoked as being engaged in attempts to shape potential solutions to ecological problems. See also Dee Carter, 'Unholy Alliances', *op. cit.*

<sup>306</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991 (London: Abacus, 1994) 549-50.



the immediate self-consciousness is constitutive for the space of all possible experience, then *narcissism* is the logical and practical consequence of this anthropocentric view of the world.<sup>307</sup>

Moltmann's theological response to such narcissism is to insist that human beings should understand their own creatureliness adequately: a construal of the self as the 'product of nature' rather than as 'subject over against nature'; and theologically, first of all as '*imago mundi*' rather than initially as 'the image of God.'<sup>308</sup> "We shall therefore talk theologically first of all about the human being as 'a creature in the fellowship of creation'; and before we interpret this being as *imago Dei*, we shall see him as *imago mundi* - as a microcosm in which all previous creatures are to be found again, a being that can only exist in community with all other created beings, and which can only understand itself in that community."<sup>309</sup>

This is the contextual nature of Moltmann's theology and is a key to his thought: he wants somehow to mediate the modern world with the Christian tradition and to stress theology's relevance and therapeutic function through demonstrating its engagement with the ills of modern society.<sup>310</sup> And in so doing, he wants to hold this relevance in creative tension with the distinctiveness of Christian theology: Rasmussen makes the assessment that "...one can rightly say that the genius of Moltmann as theologian...is his ability to make a creative use of classical Christian language in his attempt to show the relevance of Christian faith to the social and political movements (or at least to the Christians who sympathise with

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<sup>307</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.* 30-1. Cf. "The more human beings put themselves above nature the less they know who they really are. The modern crises of identity and humanity are an inescapable result of the self-isolation of human beings from nature." *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 271; also 67.

<sup>308</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* 51. Peter Scott has further developed this insight from Moltmann to construe 'a common realm of God, humanity and nature' which holds on the one hand, that the primary reference of the notion 'imaging God' is to God, and thus insists that the renewal of nature is God's own act. And on the other hand, it shores up the claim that anthropology is created as well as redeemed: it is the community of this 'common realm' that is the mode in which God chooses to be with his creation. It is something akin to Moltmann's 'cosmic community of living.' See, *inter alia*, "Beyond Stewardship? Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Nature," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 18/2 (1997): 193-202; "The Technological Factor: Redemption, Nature and the Image of God," *Zygon* 35/2 (2000): 371-384; "Christ, Nature, Sociality: Dietrich Bonhoeffer for an Ecological Age," *SJT* 53/4 (2000): 413-430.

<sup>309</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* 186.

<sup>310</sup> Note, for example, Jürgen Moltmann's introduction in his *God for a Secular Society* (London: SCM, 1999): "[H]ere I am offering 'contributions on the public relevance of theology'. There is no Christian identity without public relevance, and no public relevance without theology's Christian identity, since for Christ's sake theology is Kingdom-of-God theology", Preface.



them) which have dominated radical political thought and action during the last three decades."<sup>311</sup>

So Moltmann re-envisioning Christian doctrine while reiterating classical trinitarian belief: he locates his source material in scripture and tradition for reconstructing what he considers to be relevant new theology. This is underpinned consistently by a range of premisses, including a trinitarian construal of God,<sup>312</sup> the centrality of the story of Christ, the inherently eschatological nature of Christianity and its political and public commitment, the focus of the church as community, and an ethical agenda: a hermeneutic of Christian responsibility in the world.

Rather than, essentially, a theoretical discussion of the concept of God and its reference, Moltmann's theology is a practical engagement with the life of the church in order to reflect critically on its practice. The church is to be the unifying community whose function is to integrate God's peace and reconciliation which is the eschatological horizon of the cosmos: the 'true church' is to be the place and space of eschatological anticipations in the midst of time.

The church must be seen as the beginning of the reconciled cosmos which has arrived at peace. The church is the historical microcosm for the macrocosm which has become God's temple. It is the cosmic dimensions of the church that are meant, not the 'churchifying' of the world. As 'the body of Christ', the church is always already *the church of the whole creation* here and now...It is only as the church of the whole creation that the Christian community is anything more than a sect or a religious society. If God is not worshipped in creation, God is not properly known in the church

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<sup>311</sup> Arne Rasmussen, *op.cit.* 45. Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology*, *op. cit.* 140f. Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and The Power*, *op. cit.* notes also that all the major theological themes of two millennia are reflected in Moltmann's theology, 12. Rasmussen compares Moltmann with cultural theologian Harvey Cox's *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1969) citing Moltmann's own agreement in principle with Cox's thought, but stressing his preference for biblical testimony as theological source, rather than projecting wholly new images of Christ. As it happens, Cox himself cites Moltmann with approval, observing that, following Marx, Moltmann contends that the theologian has long interpreted experience, but that the theological task is now to change it. Cox infers that "[T]his suggests that the task of theologians is not to come to terms with existing patterns of perception but to explode them, not merely to speak to existing social structures but to undermine them." 135.

<sup>312</sup>In *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.*, Moltmann laid down his trinitarian doctrine of God: a construal of a God who suffers in the event of the Cross. God cannot die, but the Father suffers death *in* himself through suffering the pain of the death *of* the Son. For Moltmann, the word 'God' effectively stands for the event of the cross, in which the Father gives up the Son and the Son is forsaken: see Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering Of God*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 195ff. Hence the death of Christ can only be understood in terms of the Trinity of relationships between Father, Son and Spirit: the crucified God is also the saving God. This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.



either. The true church of Christ is the healing beginning of a healed creation in the midst of a sick world.<sup>313</sup>

Moltmann seeks to make a clear differentiation between the biblical God and the god of the philosophers:<sup>314</sup> a move he considers to be the necessary theoretical corrective that amounts to the disestablishment of Christianity from the religion that legitimates bourgeois society. "...[T]he time has finally come for differentiating the Father of Jesus Christ from the God of the pagans and the philosophers (Pascal) in the interest of Christian faith."<sup>315</sup> Theology has then to test the social and political implications of its doctrines, as well as the church as institution and the moral shaping of Christian life; for Moltmann, the transformative potential of Christian beliefs in contemporary society is paramount.

The theological task is therefore not just descriptive and critical, it is also one of participation, and Moltmann understands the basis for this as hope, which is itself the origin of political theology. It is the Bible that is "witness of God's promissory history and the human history of hope. The interest which guides its knowledge is an interest in the power of the future and how this is revealed in God's promises and stirred in human hope."<sup>316</sup> Modernity interprets the world as future-directed and transformable via secular politics: a world in which people must strive to realize their hopes for peace and justice. The basic and related biblical categories that Moltmann engages in order to mediate these central notions of modernity and Christian faith are "an understanding of divine revelation as *promise* and an understanding of history as *mission*."<sup>317</sup>

In a helpful discussion of the claims Moltmann makes in his writings for the notion of promise, Morse points to the attempt at the 'corrective' style which Moltmann adopts whereby in affirming an idea he contrasts it with one he refutes:

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<sup>313</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'Christ in Cosmic Context', in Hilary Regan and Alan Torrance (eds.), Christ and Context (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) 181-2. This book is a collection of essays and papers given at the symposium mentioned below.

<sup>314</sup> Brian Ingraffia sees Moltmann as following "in the tradition of Paul, Pascal, Luther, Kierkegaard, Barth, Bonhoeffer..." in seeking to make this separation; Ingraffia's own interest is to show how the confusion of these two 'Gods' has caused Christianity to be uncritically equated with ontotheology. Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 14.

<sup>315</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 215.

<sup>316</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics (London, 1984) 105, cited Arne Rasmussen, *op. cit.* 46.

<sup>317</sup> Richard Bauckham, Moltmann: Messianic Theology, *op. cit.* 24.



so the claims he makes for 'promise' are accompanied by a polemic against that which he considers to be a prevailing misconception. Morse brings together these claims and summarises them in the form of three propositions which are:

- 1 The God of the Bible is revealed not in an epiphany of eternal presence but in the form of promise.
- 2 Revelatory speech concerning God is to be understood not as descriptive-sentences but as hope-sentences.
- 3 In revelation it is not God's transcendental selfhood which is revealed but God's historical faithfulness.<sup>318</sup>

This kind of dialectical thought process can be seen in the way he combines an affirmative with a negative inherently linked to traditional doctrine and to new experiences. Thus he affirms new experience as both insightful and possibly also highlighting the inadequacy of traditional doctrine; but also he rejects the idea that new experiences are themselves absolute. Conversely, he affirms the basic concept of God that doctrine traditionally holds and expresses; then he negates these formulations as insufficiently able to explicate the biblical truths in relation to contemporary knowledge and experience.

And so Moltmann is wanting to contribute to liberative social change via his theology that is premised on hope and participation, through the dialectic therefore of theory and praxis, and this is a specifically Christian praxis. Moltmann refers to this as christopraxis - discipleship that leads the Church to the poor and the oppressed; it follows from this that theology is necessarily political and must participate practically in the struggle for justice, and see the world from the perspective of the deprived. Christ is known in and through the praxis of discipleship. As he puts it,

The guideline to this christopraxis was, and still is, the messianic interpretation of the *Torah* in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But this praxis too is not the application of a theory about Christ. It is a way of life, a way in which people learn who Jesus is, learn it with all their senses, acting and suffering, in work and prayer. To know Jesus does not simply mean learning the facts of

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<sup>318</sup> Christopher Morse, The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 27.

christological dogma. It means learning to know him in the praxis of discipleship. Theological christology remains related to this christopraxis, and has to absorb its experiences, and open people for again new experiences along the way.<sup>319</sup>

Thus for Moltmann political theology is a fundamental and necessary hermeneutical category which has as its aim the critical analysis of theology's political functions whether these are conscious or not; he writes, "...political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment, and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated."<sup>320</sup> However he derives his content not from any existential context but from scriptural sources which culminate in Jesus Christ: that is, his text is the biblical tradition to which new doctrine must relate faithfully and with which it must remain in continuity.

The centrality of the story of Christ is, then, a working premiss for Moltmann; at a symposium dedicated to theology in contemporary context,<sup>321</sup> Moltmann stated the theological departure points with which he is trying to address ecological concerns in a paper entitled 'Christ in Cosmic Context'. His intention was to illustrate how a cosmic interpretation of the Crucifixion and Resurrection moves necessarily beyond christology framed by human history, to christology within the framework of nature as a whole.

*No context without text.* My text is the biblical tradition of the creation wisdom, the wisdom-messiah and the cosmic Christ.

*No text without context.* My context is the ecological crisis of the Earth-system, in which we live and move and have our being. This is not the particular context of certain self-interests, but the global context of life. If there is not a living and life-giving Earth-system anymore, there will be no humankind either, and where there is no humankind anymore there is no Christ, no "God incarnate" either.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 42-3.

<sup>320</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope* (Philadelphia 1975) 102f, cited Arne Rasmussen, *Church as Polis*, *op. cit.* 47.

<sup>321</sup> An international theological symposium with the title "*Christ and Context: The Confrontation between Gospel and Culture*", which took place in Dunedin, New Zealand, 1992.

<sup>322</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'Christ in Cosmic Context', in Hilary Regan and Alan Torrance (eds.), *Christ and Context* *op. cit.* 180.



Moltmann goes on to say that unless "nature is healed and saved, human beings cannot ultimately be healed and saved either, for human beings are natural beings and part of nature."<sup>323</sup> Thus he wants to be clear that concern for the things of Christ calls for development of a christology of nature, christology that exceeds 'modern' doctrine which has been discussed exclusively in terms of human history.

From the seventeenth century onwards, the comprehensive paradigm 'History' was developed in Europe, as a way of interpreting human beings and nature, God and the world. ... In the human project 'scientific and technological civilisation', correspondences with nature and harmonisations with the cosmos were replaced by the new blueprint of progress from an ageing past into the new era of the future. The further the lordship of the Europeans over the other nations spread ... the more the domination of human beings over nature proceeded ...<sup>324</sup>

At the 'Christ and Context' symposium, Moltmann stated broadly his method and his objectives: he seeks a faithful interpretation of Scripture in his attempt to address the specific contemporary cultural issue of the 'ecological crisis'. He argues that anthropocentric christology fitted squarely into the modern paradigm of history, and Moltmann concedes here that theology became thus a factor, albeit

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<sup>323</sup> *ibid.* There is a hint of an anthropocentric focus here, and it is interesting to compare how he expresses a similar point, also aimed at collapsing any total distinction between humanity and nature, more recently in The Coming of God, *op. cit.*: "... we die in solidarity with the sighing and groaning community of all living creatures who are waiting for redemption (Rom. 8.19ff), for we wait for 'the redemption of the body' (Rom. 8.23). What is natural is not something that is a matter of course ... it is that which is in need of redemption." 91. Moltmann acknowledges a debt to Joseph Sittler, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 274ff, and his influence on Moltmann's thought at this point is clear: "[I]f the self is to be redeemed by Christ, *and if that self is unspecifiable* apart from its embeddedness in the world as nature, the 'the whole creation' of the Book of Genesis and of Romans 8 is seen as the logically necessary scope of christological speech." Joseph Sittler, 'The Scope of Christological Reflection', *op. cit.*

<sup>324</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 227. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, Jesus Christ for today's world, transl. Margaret Kohl, (London: SCM, 1994), 76ff. Moltmann reiterates this point and illustrates the way the paradigm 'History' has influenced modern theology: "[T]he modern separation between person and nature (as in Schleiermacher) or between covenant and creation (as in Barth) does justice neither to human nature nor to the community of creation. It is an expression of the anthropocentrism of the modern world, an anthropocentrism destructive of nature. As persons, human beings share the nature of the earth, and as natural beings they are persons." The Coming of God, *op. cit.* 92. Moltmann is anxious consistently to give content to his understanding of God's relation to God's creation, and to specify the relationship between God, humanity and nature. He poses the question, " [F]aced as we are with the progressive industrial exploitation of nature and its irreparable destruction, what does it mean to say that we believe in God the Creator, and in this world as his creation?" God in Creation, *op. cit.* xi. He responds later: "[I]f the Creator is himself present in his creation by virtue of the Spirit, then his relationship to creation must be viewed as an intricate web ... a network of relationships ... of mutuality which describe a cosmic community of living between God the Spirit and all his created beings." 14.



an unintentional one, in what he considers to be the modern destructive attitude to nature. The thrust of his point is that, in 'fitting' the modern paradigm 'history', anthropological christology is responsible for a reductionist account of redemption, which is understood as the salvation of the human soul or as authentic human existence, and thus christology has become profoundly anthropocentric.<sup>325</sup>

Moltmann claims that modern Western European theology has dismissed as speculative and mythological the cosmic christology of Colossians and Ephesians,<sup>326</sup> in much the same way as it did the patristic doctrine of the two natures. For example, there had been objections from Lutheran dogmatics, in particular, on the basis that cosmic christology is a distraction from a soteriological focus on the human individual. Such objections had been raised particularly relating to Joseph Sittler, himself a Lutheran theologian, who, in 1961 at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, addressed the subject 'the unity of the world' rather than 'the unity of the church' and based his talk on the cosmic Christ hymn in Colossians 1.15-20. "Sittler's lecture triggered off a lively discussion even at the assembly itself."<sup>327</sup>

Moltmann stresses that salvation is salvation of the whole, and therefore he seeks to try to "arrive at a practical soteriology which enters into the real wretchedness of human beings, while keeping in view the eschatological horizon of the salvation of the whole."<sup>328</sup> To do this, seemingly following Athanasius,<sup>329</sup> Moltmann presses the unity of christology and soteriology: the doctrine about the person of Christ provides the inner premiss of the soteriology, which is itself the outward result of the christology. In his attempt to address the ecological crisis, Moltmann maintains this sense of wholeness and unity:

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<sup>325</sup> Moltmann never actually engages with Lynn White directly; there is a single reference in a footnote in God in Creation, *op. cit.* 324, n 11, though this is a rather oblique reference, concerned with cultural psycho-analysis as an aspect of anthropocentrism.

<sup>326</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 276ff.

<sup>327</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 277; see also Steven Bouma-Prediger, The Greening of Theology *op. cit.* 64ff.

<sup>328</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 45.

<sup>329</sup> This unity is clear in Athanasius. For example, see Rebecca Lyman, Christology and Cosmology: models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius, (New York: Clarendon, 1993): "[S]oteriology in Athanasius thus centres on the communication of the qualities of transcendent divine nature to mutable humanity through the incarnation of the Son .... Soteriology is no longer focused on deliverance from fatalism through obedience and instruction, but deliverance from changeability through physical transformation .... Athanasius' compelling theological vision derived strength from a Christian transposition of contemporary trends to underline soteriology and cosmology, with Christ as the decisive pivot." 158f.



The ecological crisis can make the human race itself ephemeral, and can destroy all living things on earth. The antinomies of modern civilization are drawing human beings and nature deeper and deeper into a common destiny. This forbids any reduction of salvation, whether it be personal or anthropological. In the danger of annihilation that is hanging over us, God's salvation is the healing and survival of the whole threatened earth and all individual created beings, in their common peril.<sup>330</sup>

In seeking a 'christology of nature', Moltmann is therefore looking to ground the redemption of nature in an ecological christology, that is, the 'inner premiss' of the soteriology: the natural is in need of redemption. Before analysing the detail of the soteriological scheme in which Moltmann is trying to account for the redemption of all created things as the outcome of Christ's atoning work on the cross,<sup>331</sup> - that is, the 'outward result', - it is helpful and relevant to outline his christological ground: the territory he has mapped out particularly in The Way of Jesus Christ, (subtitled 'christology in messianic dimensions'), which is one of his major 'systematic contributions to theology'.<sup>332</sup> And while Moltmann has here created "an impressive new synthesis", he is also restating "central Christological insights of ... earlier work".<sup>333</sup> His underlying christological question is Bonhoeffer's formulation: "[W]ho really is Jesus Christ for us today?"<sup>334</sup> The question shapes the response, thus the 'today' stresses the present; the secondary shaper is political theology as a necessary hermeneutical category, and in this context ecological theology is included under this rubric.<sup>335</sup> Moltmann fills out the scope of the question, thus:

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<sup>330</sup> The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 46.

<sup>331</sup> The subject matter of the next chapter.

<sup>332</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, History and the Triune God, *op. cit.* 180. He prefers to describe his work in terms of contributions, rather than writing a 'systematic theology' as such. Moltmann seems to consider this reflects appropriately his recognition of his own limitations and the relative and particular nature of his environment; he declares this in the foreword to Bauckham's Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making, *op. cit.* ix-x. Cf. Richard Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, *op. cit.* 4.

<sup>333</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Moltmann's Messianic Christology," SJT vol. 44 (1991): 519-531.

<sup>334</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 64. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM, 1993). "What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today." 279. Note the title of Moltmann's short volume on christology, Jesus Christ for today's world, *op. cit.* which in the original is *Wer ist Christus für uns heute?*, literally 'Who is Christ for us today?'

<sup>335</sup> Along with 'socialist theology', the 'theology of peace', the 'theology of human rights' and 'feminist theology'; see, for example, God for a Secular Society, *op. cit.* 51-7. These theologies are not separate endeavours however, for they each inter-relate and are forms of a political liberation theology. "It was after the middle of the 1970's that an ecological-political theology developed in Europe ... and now an ecological theology of liberation has also begun to grow ... The aim is to liberate nature from human oppression, and to reintegrate human culture into the living organism of the earth." *ibid.* 63. Despite different objectives, Andrew Shanks advocates similar endeavours



So Christian theology cannot simply ask: who is Christ *for us* today? It has to ask: *Who really is Christ for the poor of the Third World?* and: Who is Christ for us, when we make use of their poverty for our own purposes? .... The Third World is not the only manifestation of the reverse side of the history of progress and the growth of economic and political power in the North Atlantic world. We discover this reverse side among 'the new poor' in the nations of the First World too .... *Who is Christ for these 'surplus' masses of people today?* .... From the very beginning, scientific and technological civilisation was aimed at the human subjugation of nature, and the increase and consolidation of human power. So although people in this civilisation are appalled by nuclear power, they are also fascinated by it. 'Nuclearism' has something religious about it, in both a positive and a negative sense, because it promises total power and total annihilation ... *Who really is Christ for us today, threatened as we are by the nuclear inferno?* .... the further progress of technological civilisation in the direction it has taken up to now is driving us towards greater and greater environmental catastrophes, the end of which can only be universal ecological death ... This is undoubtedly the third great challenge to Christian theology: *Who is Christ for dying nature and ourselves today?*<sup>336</sup>

This is a clear example of Moltmann's theology as 'participation in the struggle for justice and righteousness against suffering and oppression,' and 'taking a necessary stance in support of those who are victims of this modern world.' But this pre-occupation with the identity of Jesus - this 'Who really is this man?' - is obviously the most fundamental of questions from the earliest tradition, originating in Jesus' own actual personal encounters. His person and ministry presented a conundrum for his contemporaries, expressed by John The Baptist: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11.3, RSV). And on his entry to Jerusalem, "all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this?" (Matt. 21.10, RSV). The gospels reflect both the opaque and the elusive quality of the identity of Jesus, as well as affirming confidence in his messianic status. When Jesus himself raises the question of his own identity against a backcloth of public uncertainty - "But who do you say I am?" - Peter's answer constitutes effectively the first public confession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16.15-6, RSV). Beyond the covenant community and without an intimate relationship with Jesus,

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in God and Modernity: a new and better way to do theology, (London: Routledge, 2000). Shanks' 'new and better way' is to replace the secular ideals of the university ethos, not with what he construes as various confessionalist forms of theology - forms of 'neo-orthodoxy', the prototype of which is Karl Barth and whose contemporary exponents include Oliver O'Donovan, John Milbank, George Lindbeck, but with a range of contextual theologies such as 'green theology', 'feminist theology', 'black theology', 'peace movement theology' as well as 'liberation theology'.

<sup>336</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 66ff.



the centurion at the Cross perceives something of the identity of the man crucified as the King of the Jews: "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27. 54, RSV).

The status of such statements as actual immediate contemporary responses or as reflections of the concerns of the early Church is clearly a matter of debate, but that debate is, however, not relevant in the present context. What is relevant to the christological question is that the Jesus of the Gospel record must be understood both in terms of his own religio-cultural context and in the history of the nascent Church. Certain themes of the Judaism of the time are perceptible in the early traditions of interpretation: the expression of the expectations of apocalypticism, (e.g. 1 Thess), the 'piety of the poor' which expressed faith in a God who intercedes on behalf of oppressed victims, (e.g. the infancy narratives) and reflections of the righteousness and justice which were the aspirations of the politically activist Zealot movement (e.g. the meeting on the road to Emmaus). Thus, the kinds of themes and causes embraced by Moltmann are always already present in the tradition of christological reflection.

It is the tension inherent in the attempt to re-understand these themes and concerns in the present that is surely intrinsic to Bonhoeffer's christological formulation, and hence also Moltmann's question regarding Jesus' identity: how to express the encounter with Christ today, 2000 years on, when an appeal to any immediate access is not an option?

The phrase 'Jesus Christ our Lord' designates, not primarily an historical individual in the past, nor yet a character in a symbolic story, but a present reality actually experienced within the common life ... But if it is important for us to recognise that the Church's memory of Jesus and its experience of his living Presence belong essentially to its existence and not to any process of what has come to be called 'mythologising', it is almost equally important that we see that ... when expressing or communicating ... the realised inner meaning of this existence, ... this meaning was realised as a *divine* meaning, and one cannot express such meaning, or even realise it for oneself, without resort to mythological speech.<sup>337</sup>

In considering what the notion 'Jesus Christ our Lord' might entail, Knox is reflecting here two particular approaches to christology which indicate that it the mode of the perceived encounter with Christ that is determinative of each: a focus

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<sup>337</sup> John Knox, The Humanity and Divinity of Christ (New York: CUP, 1967) 3.



on the testimony of the past, or an engagement with the experience of the present. Moltmann distinguishes between these two approaches as first, apologetic, and second, therapeutic. In the course of history, the question of who Jesus is today has been answered in these ways:

*Apologetic christology* was supposed to put people in a position to 'make a defence to anyone for the hope that is in you' (1 Peter 3.15). It gathers together proofs for Jesus' messiahship and his resurrection, in order to clear away doubts and make faith possible. *Therapeutic christology* is soteriological christology. It confronts the misery of the present with the salvation Christ brings, presenting it as a salvation that heals. Healing power belongs to salvation; otherwise it could not save. These two kinds of relevance are not mutually exclusive. They complement each other.<sup>338</sup>

Moltmann's christology is, in its main thrust, 'therapeutic'; as such, the doctrine of the person of Christ is inextricably bound to his work on the cross. Moltmann is here following in the Lutheran tradition of Melanchthon in which our acknowledgement of the divinity of Christ comes through the reality of the salvation only he can offer and effect.<sup>339</sup> Thus for Moltmann, the *pro nobis* structure of christological confession is that the question of the identity of Jesus is meaningful in terms of the salvation he offers to those who suffer in the 'misery of the present'. But Moltmann is surely not guilty of any unrelieved subjectivism here, precisely because he would construe salvation in Christ eschatologically, as gift and promise and in the light of the resurrection: his christology is symbolised as 'on the way', and as such, is also a 'christology of the way' and 'a christology of

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<sup>338</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 44.

<sup>339</sup> "Who Jesus Christ is becomes known in his saving action." Philipp Melanchthon, *Preface to the Loci Communes* (1521) (CR 21, 85) cited by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man* (London: SCM Xpress, 1996) 38. Pannenberg rejects therapeutic christology on the grounds that christology becomes somehow a function of soteriology and thus runs the risk of degenerating into wish-fulfilment in which human desires for meaning can be variously projected onto the historical Jesus, *ibid.* 39ff. Colin Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: a Study of Continuities in Christology*, (London: DLT, 1983), renders Melanchthon thus - "[T]o know Christ is to know his benefits, not to contemplate his natures and his modes of incarnation, as the scholastics teach." 26-7, and explains helpfully, that in that passage "Melanchthon was protesting against the excessive objectivism of the scholastics in order to teach a Christ who is not simply an object of knowledge, but is what he is in the meaning he has for believers. In post-Kantian thought this Lutheran tendency to elevate the significance of Christ 'for me' over his significance in himself tended, as Pannenberg sees, to degenerate into subjectivism, in which his significance is almost made to depend on the believer, or at least on the believer's mode of apprehension...Christology on this account must be subordinate to soteriology, because only that is conceded which derives from Christ's supposed benefits. As a consequence, it may happen that truth is made subordinate to meaning and Christology deprived of any basis in fact." *Ibid.* Cf. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 58.



those on the way'.<sup>340</sup> As christology 'on the way', it expresses something of the orientation and the goal of christology. "The earthly - the crucified - the raised - the present - the coming One: these are the stages of God's eschatological history with Jesus. It is these stages which the title 'Christ' gathers together, and it is these which should interpenetrate christology and provide its framework."<sup>341</sup>

As well as being therapeutic in approach, Moltmann's christology is, in kind, a form of christopraxis. Moltmann would reject any restriction of salvation in Christ to the religious realm. That is, our experience of his effects does not occur simply in terms of an individual awareness of being forgiven, nor merely in terms of participation in the life of the church. While christological reflection must be concerned with Christian experience and traditions, it is not exhausted by these. For Moltmann, such a restriction would be to run too close to a privatised form of religion which is heir to the Enlightenment, and which has rendered Christianity a religion of society - a 'civil religion' - that, potentially, can legitimate dysfunctional socio-political forms. A part of Christianity's transformative potential is to take a critical stance with relation to the status quo and hence over against the (secular) state, not to shore it up ideologically which is a form of idolatry.

A theology which with its christology goes along with the modern experience of subjectivity, and now conveys the content of the Christian doctrine of salvation only in as far as this is related to the individual subject of experience, is no longer willing - and no longer able - to call in question the social conditions and political limitations of this experience of subjectivity. This theology fits without any conflict into the requirements of the 'civil religion' of modern society. As the 'civil religion' of that society, it ministers to its educated and ruling classes, but not to its victims.<sup>342</sup>

A christology 'of the way' invokes activity, and as an activity, Christian theological reflection about Christ is a form of discipleship. A christology 'of those on the way' invokes a call to discipleship and addresses an ethical category. "The premise of christology is Christian faith; so it also presupposes christopraxis, in the broadest sense of the word; for christopraxis is the source from which christology springs ...To confess faith in Christ goes together with discipleship."<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* xiiif.

<sup>341</sup> *ibid.* 33.

<sup>342</sup> *ibid.* 63. Moltmann cites Schleiermacher as an example of this kind of theology: that which 'proclaimed the gospel to the cultured among Christianity's despisers, but not to poor sinners.'

<sup>343</sup> *ibid.* 41.



In terms of christopraxis, our knowledge or understanding of Christ is not derived from our own religious experience, nor through our participation as members in the life of the Church. Rather, coming to know the Messiah is the praxis of a form of discipleship: a commitment to participation in his messianic mission, characterised by a way of being that is conformed to and shaped by his goal of justice and righteousness - the shalom of the Sabbath. The goal of creation is nothing less than God resting (Gen. 2. 2-3) - that is, being-with his creation in perfect freedom.<sup>344</sup> Moltmann speaks of freedom in the context of the future, and the freedom to continue to hope for a more just future for all. By taking the messianic promise as the departure point of christology, it is necessarily eschatologically determined: the messianic mission to reconcile and redeem remains underway. And this christopraxis - this oriented discipleship - is always already related to ecclesial practice: that is, in the church where eschatological moments may be from time to time anticipated.

The lamentable cleavage between faith in Christ and hope for the future can be healed in an eschatological christology which leads on to a christological eschatology. This means that when we perceive Jesus as the Christ, we do so in remembered hope. It is this recollection of hope that is practised in every Eucharist.<sup>345</sup>

Moltmann's christology is, then, therapeutic in approach, and is a form of christopraxis. By taking the messianic promise as his start-point for christology, Moltmann is further developing certain premisses he established in Theology of Hope, in which he set the revelation of God in the event of crucifixion and resurrection in relation to the expectations disclosed by the Old Testament history of promise.<sup>346</sup> But whereas he was there primarily concerned with Jesus' resurrection and with the 'eschatological horizon' opened up by his resurrection, in The Way of Jesus Christ he is "beginning with the Spirit-christology which apprehends Jesus as the messianic prophet of the poor."<sup>347</sup> What is at issue is the way in which the presence of God is construed in the person of Christ. One of the earliest notions of God's presence in Christ is embodied in the title 'Messiah': Jesus as Messiah bears the eschatological spirit of God. Thus while realism of the

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<sup>344</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation, *op. cit.* 276-96, for a discussion of the significance of the Sabbath for all creation.

<sup>345</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 5.

<sup>346</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, *op. cit.* 141.

<sup>347</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 3.



Spirit is certainly and necessarily political, it points beyond and toward "to the idea of unhindered participation in the eternal life of God himself":<sup>348</sup> an idea, which, for Moltmann, is expressed in the Sabbath rest in which God will be all in all, and all of God's creatures will participate in his eternal Kingdom.

A further premiss established by Moltmann in The Way of Jesus Christ is that the ecological dimension present in God in Creation must be developed christologically in order to resist, or maybe rescue, reflection on Jesus Christ from the distorted perspective of a merely anthropocentric or ecclesiocentric belief in salvation. The ecological dimension is already present in the doctrine of creation, and rooted in the trinitarian divine economy, along with the social and relational dimensions. "If the Creator is himself present in his creation by virtue of the Spirit, then his relationship to creation must rather be viewed as an intricate web of unilateral, reciprocal and many-sided relationships ... relationships of *mutuality* which describe a cosmic community of living between God the Spirit and all his created beings."<sup>349</sup>

This understanding in relational terms provides an analogy between the inner mutuality of the divine persons and God's relation with the world that God creates: a "unique, perfect, perichoretic fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ... (taken) as archetype of all relationships in creation and redemption that correspond to God, the reciprocal perichoresis of the Father and the Son and the Spirit (John 17.21)."<sup>350</sup> Distancing himself from a "simple pantheism that makes everything a matter of indifference",<sup>351</sup> it is this relationship that is the basis of Moltmann's panentheism:

'Creation in the Spirit of God' is an understanding which does not merely set creation over against God. It also simultaneously takes creation into God, though without divinizing it. In the creative and life-giving powers of the Spirit, God *pervades* his creation. In the Sabbath rest he allows his creatures to exert an influence on him. From the aspect of the Spirit in creation, the relationship of God and the world must also be viewed as a perichoretic relationship.<sup>352</sup>

<sup>348</sup> Timothy Gorrige, Discerning Spirit (London: SCM, 1990) 66.

<sup>349</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation, *op. cit.* 14.

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*, 258.

<sup>351</sup> *ibid.* 103. Here Moltmann explains, "(B)ut this is where the error lies: everything is not God; God is everything...Heine was pointing to the difference between pan-entheism and pantheism. Whereas simple pantheism makes everything a matter of indifference, panentheism is capable of differentiation. Whereas simple pantheism sees merely eternal, divine presence, panentheism is able to discern future transcendence, evolution and intentionality."

<sup>352</sup> *ibid.* 258.



Hence "(O)ur starting point here is that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the trinitarian perichoresis: God *in* the world and the world *in* God."<sup>353</sup> Therefore always already present in the theology of the Trinity, it follows that the ecological interest must also be a dimension in christology. An ecological doctrine of creation is a pneumatological doctrine: God's presence is God's Spirit. This pneumatological doctrine of creation is a particular transition; as Moltmann himself describes it, "a further step to escape from the paradigm of the modern world, which can be summed up under the headings 'subjectivity', 'materialisation' and 'history', my purpose being to prepare a theology which will be in a position to relate human history to the nature of the earth, and to reconcile the two."<sup>354</sup>

In his social doctrine of the Trinity,<sup>355</sup> Moltmann had taken a previous step to "free the Christian doctrine of God from the confines of the ancient metaphysics of substance, and from the framework of the modern metaphysics of transcendental subjectivity ... to develop ... the Trinity in the different context of a metaphysics of community, process and relation."<sup>356</sup> In some analogous way for his christology, Moltmann makes a kind of 'layered' move to forge the necessary transitional stage for a new paradigm: "this christology implies the transition from the metaphysical christology of the 'ancients' to the historical christology of modern times to a post-modern christology, which places human history ecologically in the framework of nature."<sup>357</sup> For his 'newer thinking' he draws on the thought of the two previous paradigms. First, the old incarnational two natures christology of the cosmocentric world of the early Church, which is no longer appropriate as such. Second, the historical/anthropological christology of modernity which followed it: a paradigm that has given rise to a range of dysfunctional effects which themselves fit into the scheme of causal factors related to the ecological crisis. He takes up the old metaphysical thinking again, under the conditions of 'historical thinking', and in a cosmological perspective.

A transition does not have to be a breach. Transitions can also place traditions within wider horizons, and preserve older perceptions by translating them into new situations. Modern historical thinking set human history over against a nature without history. Newer thinking

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<sup>353</sup> *ibid.* 17.

<sup>354</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* xv-vi.

<sup>355</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1981).

<sup>356</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* xv.

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.* xvi.



integrates human history in the natural conditions in which it is embedded. Modern christology therefore directs its attention towards Christ's bodily nature and its significance for earthly nature as a whole, because embodiment is the existential point of intersection between history and nature in human beings.<sup>358</sup>

The old incarnational christology of the early Church emerged from a neo-Platonist cosmocentric worldview with its inherent philosophical dualisms that divided the world into, on the one hand, immutable, divine, eternal reality, and on the other hand, transient, profane, perishable materiality. Soteriological concerns were focused therefore on how to transcend human nature, subject as it is to death and decay, that is, to transience, and hence to participate in the eternal nature of the divine. In the philosophical framework of this construal, it is the incarnation that is the uniting principle between Jesus and God, rather than the resurrection. The soteriological agent is the divine Logos, who, as the pre-existent Son of God assumes human nature so that humanity might participate in his imperishable eternal nature: in assuming human nature, the divine Logos unites humanity and divinity in the person Jesus. This is the background to the Chalcedonian definition of "Jesus Christ as one person with two natures, human and divine, which are united but not mixed."<sup>359</sup>

Post-enlightenment modernity replaced the cosmocentric world with the anthropocentric world of human concerns: individual subjectivity, autonomy and authentic existence. Questions about God were no longer couched in terms of cosmocentrism; if such questions arose at all, they were expressed in the context of anthropology. Enlightenment rationalism, particularly Kantian epistemology, imposed canons of reasoning to dispense with revelation as an intellectually defensible mode of knowing. Bruised by these experiences, theology responded in the nineteenth century by turning to the subject. Traditional christology which placed the God-man at the centre was displaced and usurped by the human being placed as the starting point - the microcosm of the macrocosm - from whom conclusions about the human condition and the world could be generalised. Questions about Jesus were contingent on questions about the individual human subject.<sup>360</sup> The paradigm example of this turn-to-the-subject theology is

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<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Donald McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms (Louisville: WJK, 1996) 42. The Council of Chalcedon (451) - the fourth ecumenical council - reaffirmed the christological statements of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

<sup>360</sup> Walter Kasper, Theology and The Church (London: SCM, 1989) 103-4.



Schleiermacher, who mounted a substantive critique of the christological tradition, which rejected 'that aspect of it known as the two-nature doctrine', and which "represents the first major attempt to incorporate into Christian theology the Enlightenment's savage attack on orthodoxy..."<sup>361</sup>

Moltmann is critical of both these paradigms. Patristic theology was primarily focused on the vertical relation between God and humanity, and thus downplayed not only the particular history of Jesus Christ, but also its eschatological directedness.<sup>362</sup> As such, incarnational christology tended to eclipse the man Jesus, crucified and resurrected, and furthermore seems to be grounded in a concept of God that owes more to the God of the Philosophers than to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.<sup>363</sup> Anthropological christology is inadequate in a range of ways. For example, at heart, it is an abstraction - the individual autonomous agent and experiencing subject: human nature is extrapolated from a range of contexts which shape human destiny, i.e. the cultural, the social, the political, and these lead to the privatisation of religion. Rather than Jesus as the messianic human saviour, Jesus is reduced to an exemplary human subject. In essence therefore, right to the present times, this christology is a form of Jesuology:

...this modern Jesuology has made the human Jesus of Nazareth the projection screen for all the different fantasies of the true humanity which alienated men and women are seeking - men and women who have become strangers to themselves: Jesus offers pure personhood, absolute humanity, the faith that gives inner certitude, and so forth.<sup>364</sup>

Neither of these christological paradigms will suffice: nor is either able to respond adequately to the question of who Jesus Christ is for us today in our present context. Neither meets Moltmann's methodological maxims: the centrality of the story of Jesus and a christological construal within the framework of nature as a whole. More generally, each takes a departure point from metaphysical or anthropological perspectives insufficiently related to the Gospel message and the story of Jesus the Messiah. In some measure each is a representative of

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<sup>361</sup> Colin Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: a Study of Continuities in Christology*, *op. cit.* 88. This text includes a sustained engagement with Schleiermacher's critique.

<sup>362</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, *op. cit.* 201.

<sup>363</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 52ff.

<sup>364</sup> *ibid.* 61.



christology 'from above' and 'from below' respectively,<sup>365</sup> a distinction Moltmann wishes to transcend in favour of a christology in the eschatological history of God.<sup>366</sup> In this respect he is taking up and developing the eschatological direction proposed in The Crucified God of a christology that points forwards; in fact, he insists there that the distinction 'from above' and 'from below' is more apparent than real.

According to ancient theological doctrine, the order of knowing (*ratio cognoscendi*) works in the opposite direction from the order of being (*ratio essendi*). What is the last thing for human knowledge is first with regard to being. Whereas Jesus is not recognisable as the Son of God until his death on the cross and his resurrection, in the order of being he is the Son of God before this history takes place. All knowledge begins inductively 'from below' and is *a posteriori*, and all historical knowledge is *post factum*; but that which is to be known precedes it.<sup>367</sup>

Whether Moltmann is successful in transcending the distinctions is another matter. In a sense he constructs a form of christology from below by taking a universal soteriological context as his departure point. Indeed this is surely inevitable given the therapeutic thrust of his christology, previously identified. As Gunton states: "the real impulse to Christology from below (is) the urge to find in this world, not in some assumed transcendent realm, the starting-point for Christology."<sup>368</sup> This is not here a criticism. Rather, Gunton makes the dogmatic point that, in this aim, lies the moment of truth to be conceded to the exponents of christology from below: "that we may not begin in the heavens, and move thence to earth, but must in some way or other earth our christology in the historical Jesus. Christology must begin with Jesus."<sup>369</sup> But this moment of truth must be qualified: again as Gunton puts it, 'we may not build our own ladder to heaven', for such a mediation, or bridge between heaven and earth, is God's initiative and is indeed the point of the ascension. "The ascension of Jesus is concerned to bring

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<sup>365</sup> Christology from below "is to begin theological enquiry more on a this-worldly plane than in flights of speculation about the eternal *Logos*. Christology from below aims to ground what it has to say primarily in the anthropological or, more generally, in that which has to do with time rather than with eternity." Colin Gunton, Yesterday and Today: a Study of Continuities in Christology, 10. "...Christology from above is the method which begins with a concept of God and his relations to the world and then fits into it the human and historical elements provided by the New Testament. Everything is methodologically determined by the meaning of the word *God*, which is thus supposed to be understood in advance of historical particularities." *ibid.* 34.

<sup>366</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 70.

<sup>367</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 91.

<sup>368</sup> Colin Gunton, Yesterday and Today: a Study of Continuities in Christology, *op. cit.* 26.

<sup>369</sup> Colin Gunton, Christ and Creation (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992) 67.



out the character of the mediation that he represents and is."<sup>370</sup> The mediation required for our encounter with God must necessarily be provided by God:

That is the point of christology, or the confession that in Jesus it is not merely a man but the eternal God who meets us....The content of the affirmation is, to be sure, that *all* that Jesus does and suffers is the work of the Father through the Spirit, and therefore the action and passion of the divine Son. But the reason we make it is not because it is in some way evident or demonstrable 'from below', but because God the Father through the Holy Spirit makes it knowable - reveals to us - that the whole is his work and will.<sup>371</sup>

Moltmann intends his eschatological christology to draw on the insights of the two earlier paradigms of the tradition, thus enabling a broader frame of reference for, on the one hand, anthropological concerns by integrating human history with the history of nature; and on the other hand, of the cosmic concerns of the earlier cosmological christology. This framework effectively takes the form of a narrative christology, telling the story of Jesus the Christ in eschatological terms: on the way to his messianic future which entails the future redemption of the cosmos.

Because history can only be *told*, in a sequence, we shall tell the different parts of this history one after another, and shall then try to reduce the tradition of ideas to a christological definition ... We shall begin with the messianic mission of Jesus, the prophet of the poor, go on to the apocalyptic passion of Jesus, the Son of the Father, and then arrive at the transfiguring raising of Jesus from the dead. We shall devote particular attention to his reconciliation of the cosmos, as the Wisdom of creation. In the future of Christ in judgment and kingdom, we then find the completion of salvation in the glory of God, and the fulfilment of the promise of reconciliation in the redemption of the world. In accordance with the different situations of this divine eschatological history, the person of Jesus Christ changes and expands, until he is seen 'face to face'.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> *ibid.* 66.

<sup>371</sup> *ibid.* 67-8. Gunton makes some further concessions to the advocates of christology from below: that rightly they find a docetic tendency in orthodox christology - the domination by treatments of the divine Christ has failed to do justice to Chalcedon's 'of one substance with ourselves.' And also, he accepts their suspicion that our 'immanentist' culture makes difficult any coming to terms with transcendentalist thinking. *ibid.* 70.

<sup>372</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 71.



But - as previously indicated - he seems to be making a 'layered' move. His doctrine of creation is a pneumatological doctrine, so too is his christology. Moltmann's new christological paradigm "combines the two key concepts of *eschatological process* and *relationality* .... Within this eschatological process, Jesus is he who becomes in his trinitarian relationships to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and also in his social relationships with other people and with nature ... This, of course creates Christology's essential connection with soteriology."<sup>373</sup> This 'essential connection' is rendered by Christ's 'social relationships': in describing his new paradigm as "an emphatically *social* christology",<sup>374</sup> Moltmann is stressing that Jesus, both as divine and human person, is the one who is also in solidarity with others and representative of them. The overall framework is a pneumatological christology, which replaces incarnational christology, though Moltmann does not regard these as alternatives: uniquely Jesus bears the Spirit who is the mediator of his unique Sonship to the Father.<sup>375</sup>

Pneumatological christology enables Jesus' history to flow out of the trinitarian history of God; the narrative of his life - his person and vocation - are determined by his relationships, first, with the Father whose love he embodies and whose eschatological kingdom he proclaims, and second, with the Spirit who is the very presence of God within him. It preserves the logic of Moltmann's messianic christology in which Jesus fulfils the Old Testament history of promise. As the promised Messiah and bearer of eschatological Spirit, Jesus is the one who pours out the Spirit on all flesh. This messianic mission of Jesus was not reflected in its fullness, if at all, within the old incarnational paradigm.

The experience of the Spirit evidently provides a differently supported logic of correspondence between the experience of Christ's presence and the remembrance of his history. If Christ is present now in the eternal Spirit of God, then his history must have been determined by this Spirit from the very beginning. One of the oldest confessional fragments, Rom. 1.3f., says: 'Born of the seed of David according to the flesh - proved to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit who sanctifies since the time when he rose from the dead.' 1 Tim. 3.16 also names these two stages: 'God is manifested in the flesh - vindicated in the Spirit'. According to this the experience of the risen Christ is the experience of the Spirit.<sup>376</sup>

<sup>373</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, *op. cit.* 206.

<sup>374</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 71.

<sup>375</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, *op. cit.* 207.

<sup>376</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 77-8. Whether Moltmann's pneumatological christology is fully successful in accounting for all the ontological requirements usually ascribed to a Logos christology is far from clear, however. As Bauckham, 'Moltmann's



Within this pneumatological framework, Moltmann's further move is to take up 'some of the old metaphysical thinking again', as he puts it, to address the pressing contemporary question of 'who Christ is today' particularly with regard to who is Jesus Christ for dying nature and ourselves today. Moltmann's response is a re-articulation of the concept of the cosmic Christ, which draws on particular aspects of patristic cosmic christology. His consideration of Sittler's lecture in New Delhi leads him to conclude that:

Christology can only arrive at its completion at all in a cosmic christology. All other christologies fall short and do not provide an adequate content for the experiences of the Easter witnesses with the risen Christ. If Christ is the first-born from the dead, then he cannot be merely 'the new Adam' of a new humanity. He must also be understood as the first-born of the whole creation. All things are created in the vista that stretches forward to the messiah, for the messiah will redeem all things for their own truth, and will gather them for the kingdom of God, thus completing and perfecting creation. But this means that the risen Christ is not present only in the Spirit of faith and in the Spirit that animates the community of his people. Nor is he present merely in hidden form in world history...He is present not only in the human victims of world history but in victimized nature too.<sup>377</sup>

Moltmann's use of language - that 'the messiah will gather (all things) ... thus completing and perfecting creation' - shows a preference for an understanding of redemption as completion, rather than redemption as a kind of return, a restoration of some pre-Fall state of Eden. This preference, shared with Sittler, indicates the privileging of an Irenaean understanding of the relation between creation and redemption over an Augustinian way. As Gunton describes,

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Messianic Christology', *SJT*, *op. cit.* 527, points out, Moltmann's focus on pneumatological christology "enables him to sidestep a classic Christological issue; it is less clear that his own trinitarian theology ought to allow him to evade it." A fundamental issue is at stake: how is the pre-existence of the Son in the eternal fellowship of God understood within a pneumatological christology. A crucial issue surely, for how is the Word to be understood as co-creator? Moltmann himself acknowledges that the issue is one of Sonship, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 143. But Jesus' identity as the Son of the Father is *mediated* by the Spirit, not *constituted* by it. What constitutes Jesus' identity as Son is his relationship with the Father, rather than his relationship with the Spirit. It may be that Moltmann's critique of the *filioque* might be relevant here. In earlier work, eg. *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.*, he had raised criticism of the addition of the *filioque* clause, which he develops more fully in his later *The Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.* Drawing on the unity of Word and Breath to express the unity of Son and Spirit, he argues that in the order of the Trinity there is not just the order of Father-Son-Spirit, but also the order of God-Spirit-Word everywhere too - God creates all things through the breath of his life in his creative words. 293. Perhaps this negotiates, in some measure, the difficulty of the constitution of Sonship via the creative breath of the Spirit?

<sup>377</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 278-9.



Irenaeus' "robust doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh, was able ... to affirm the goodness of the world, which is for him, as it is created, the object of God's providential concern... Irenaeus' eschatology is not ... one of return, ... but is a movement *forward* to the perfection of all things intended by the creator."<sup>378</sup> Like Sittler,<sup>379</sup> Moltmann sees going back to Irenaeus' 'all-comprehensive *recapitulatio mundi*' as a way to unite nature and grace and collapse the dualism between them in the Western church: a dualism heir to Augustine's understanding of creation and its relation to redemption, and a dualism that has contributed to the down-grading and subjugation of nature in the west.

Pelikan's discussion of the cosmic Christ in patristic christology is helpful in demonstrating some of the features which are taken up by Moltmann. The divine Logos was conceived as the divine mind or reason of the cosmos, and if Logos was the reason of God, then it was possible to understand the Logos as the ontological ground and structure of the universe. This entails that it was the Logos who brought harmony to the cosmos, ordering rational structure and system out of chaos.

Created out of nonbeing, the cosmos manifested in its 'order and providence' the ordering presence of 'the Logos of God who is over all and governs all.' The universe was not 'absurd', that is, 'bereft of the Logos', but made sense because of the Logos. Conversely, its hold on reality was derived from its hold on the Logos, without whom it would slip back into nonbeing: 'God guides (the universe) by the Logos, so that by the direction, providence and ordering of the Logos, the creation may be illumined and enabled to abide always securely.'<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Colin Gunton, The Christian Faith: an introduction to Christian Doctrine (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 24-5. See also Colin Gunton, The Triune Creator, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998), for a discussion of the range of views in the Christian tradition about the relation between creation, fall and the redemption that undoes the fall: for "Irenaeus, 'good' *means* precisely that which is destined for perfection...Redemption or salvation is that divine action which returns the creation to its proper direction, its orientation to its eschatological destiny, which is to be perfected in due course of time by God's enabling it to be that which it was created to be." 56. It is the coming of Christ in the midst of time that constitutes God's action of radical re-direction.

<sup>379</sup> For Sittler, the doctrine most appropriate to articulating the relationship between theology and ecology is the doctrine of grace: not a traditional doctrine of grace, for the scope of grace has been narrowed historically such that grace has become 'almost exclusively administered' in relation to humanity. That is, the stress on 'the realms of history and the moral' has been to the neglect of the 'biblical Christology of nature.' "Sittler's entire life project could be fairly described as an attempt to reconceive the doctrine of grace in such a way that its full cosmic scope is visible." Steven Bouma-Prediger, The Greening of Theology, *op. cit.* 68.

<sup>380</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries (New Haven: Yale, 1997) 67.



Thus the Logos was the ontological glue of the cosmos: slipping away from the Logos was to slip back into nonbeing. And this was the way sin was construed in the Eastern Church, as a turning away from God and therefore losing a hold on reality: a backsliding into nonbeing and hence into a condition of transience and decay. Indeed this was the destiny of a fallen creation: a return to chaos. It was to avoid this catastrophe that the Logos became incarnate; the cosmological principle which understood the Logos as the ground of being also held together God's creative and redemptive purposes. As co-Creator, the Logos too created *ex nihilo* an ordered cosmos of beauty and design, and thus it is the Logos incarnate, again as co-Creator, who would redeem and save from disorder and disintegration. "Not only did 'all things hold together' in Christ the Logos as the Structure of the cosmos, but it would also be in the Logos as Saviour that 'the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God'."<sup>381</sup>

The Eastern Church regarded death as a manifestation of the transience of things, and sin was construed as related to this process, rather than as related to human guilt and moral wrongdoing, which is the view the Western Church came to take. Salvation was understood as deification or divinisation, that is, perishable mortal nature could participate in imperishable, immortal, divine nature because - and only because - the ontological grounding of the cosmos was constituted by the death and resurrection of the divine Logos. And it is this achievement of incarnational, cosmological christology which Moltmann has taken up in his eschatological, cosmic christology: the links between creation and incarnation, incarnation and resurrection, and between resurrection and the consummation of the whole created order.

The foundation for a knowledge of the cosmic Christ 'through whom are all things' is, as I believe, the Easter experience of the risen Jesus. What was 'seen' there goes beyond all historical remembrances and experiences, and touches the innermost constitution of creation itself. According to Rom. 4.17, resurrection and creation are closely linked. The God who raises the dead is the same God who is creator calls into being the things that are not; and the God who called the world into existence out of nothing is the God who raises the dead. Beginning and end, creation and resurrection, belong together and must not be separated from one another; for the

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<sup>381</sup> *ibid.*



glorification of creation through the raising of the dead is creation's perfecting, and creation is aligned towards the resurrection of the dead.<sup>382</sup>

Moltmann is not alone in reviving cosmic christology, and seeing the divine Logos as the Alpha and Omega, the origin and the goal of creation. In a world threatened by the ecological crisis, a re-stated form of cosmic christology makes soteriological sense, both therapeutically and indeed also apologetically. In taking up cosmic christology in a major way, clearly Moltmann owes a debt to Sittler, who was "both prophet and sage on the issue of ecology and theology."<sup>383</sup> One of Sittler's prime concerns was surely to consider a properly prophetic understanding of scripture: in particular Colossians 1.15-20. Methodologically, he sought "the counterpoint between exegesis and systematic theology - with focus upon Christology."<sup>384</sup> He draws on Ricoeur's method of non-ostensive reference whereby the sense of the text is not behind the text, something hidden, but rather is in front of it, as something disclosed. Sittler cites Ricoeur:

...it is not the initial discourse situation which has to be understood but that which, in the non-ostensive reference of the text, points toward a world which bursts the reader's situation as well as that of the author ... Understanding the text is to follow its movement from the sense to its reference, from what it says to that about which it talks. Beyond my situation as reader, beyond the author's situation, I offer myself to the possible modes of being-in-the-world which the text opens up and discovers for me.<sup>385</sup>

Sittler applies this hermeneutic to the insight that "there is a momentum and a directionality at work in the scope and variety of the New Testament witness to Jesus as the Christ" to argue for the whole creation as the logically necessary

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<sup>382</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for today's world*, *op. cit.* 91-2.

<sup>383</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, *op. cit.* 214. See also H Paul Santmire "So That He Might Fill all Things: Comprehending the Cosmic Love of Christ," *Dialog* 42:3 (Fall 2003): 257-278. He states that "[A] new theological era of cosmic christology is upon us. Themes that are at least as old as the Letter to the Ephesians are today being expounded in ways that may be unprecedented since the era of Irenaeus in the second century." Santmire makes the interesting proposal of Jesus as the cosmic good shepherd as a development within the tradition of the image of Christ as good shepherd which has shaped Christian experience in many tangible ways throughout time.

<sup>384</sup> Joseph Sittler, "The Scope of Christological Reflection," *Interpretation* XXVI/3 (July 1972): 328-337. This helpful and interesting article by Sittler is curiously neglected by Bouma-Prediger despite the work of Sittler being a focus of his book.

<sup>385</sup> Paul Ricoeur, unpublished paper read to the Divinity School faculty at the University of Chicago, Spring 1971, cited Sittler, *ibid.*



scope for christological speech. The inference from Ricoeur is that almost the "entire corpus of biblical study pushes toward but seldom articulates that the New Testament is a document that stands between events - whatever their nature and quite independent of concerns of 'verifiability' - that were constitutive of a unique community."<sup>386</sup> In this new faith community, "widening circles of reference spin out in larger and larger orbits until, in Colossians, chapter 1, and in the great rhetorical passage in Ephesians, chapter 1, it enfolds 'all things' as destined in Christ to be interpreted as existing to 'the praise of His glory.'"<sup>387</sup>

Others have made strong points in favour of cosmic christology and well before Moltmann's own move: for example, an exegetical study of Colossians 1 concludes that "the decision forced upon us by Col. 1.15-20 is that what Bultmann calls 'gnostic' - that is, the cosmic dimension of the work of Christ - is actually very close to the heart of the New Testament message."<sup>388</sup> An extensive survey of interpretative issues finds that "cosmic christology, far from being a late addendum, belongs to the core of the Pauline concept of Lord, no less than does the theology of the cross."<sup>389</sup> Included in this survey are texts from Romans, I Corinthians, Philippians, and Ephesians, as well as the contested Colossians 1. 15-20, and similar conclusions to Sittler's are reached based on 'more thorough and solid exegetical grounds'; for example, "man and the whole creation are bound together in redemption", and furthermore that "Christ's cosmic work was no less essential to Paul's christology than Christ's redemptive work."<sup>390</sup>

Santmire argues the need to replace the unecological and acosmic strands in the tradition, which have been dominant in the modern period, with the reformulation, in our present context and in our own public language, of "the ecologically and cosmically rich thought of traditional Christianity."<sup>391</sup> He seeks to reclaim and 'revise the classical Christian story to identify and to celebrate its ecological and its cosmic promise.' Santmire's project of cosmic christology

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<sup>386</sup> Joseph Sittler, "The Scope of Christological Reflection," *op. cit.*

<sup>387</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> James Burtneiss, "All the Fullness," *Dialog* 3 (Autumn 1964): 257-263, cited Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, *op. cit.* 64. As Sittler has also observed, "For a long time the extraordinary amplitude of Colossians 1:15-22 was reduced to dogmatically less embarrassing size by dismissing it as super-heated rhetoric fashioned by the writer to relate Christian claims for Christ to the scope of Gnostic speculation, and indeed, possibly to have borrowed its images from that tradition. This tactic is no longer possible." Joseph Sittler, "The Scope of Christological Reflection," *op. cit.*

<sup>389</sup> John Gibbs, "Pauline Cosmic Christology and Ecological Crisis," *JBL* 90 (December 1971): 466-479, cited Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, *op. cit.* 64.

<sup>390</sup> *ibid.* 65.

<sup>391</sup> Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn*, *op. cit.* 9.



stands in contradistinction to that of Fox, who has reduced the cosmic Christ to *Christus Exemplar*.<sup>392</sup> Employing Scott's<sup>393</sup> typology again here to mark out the differences between these projects, Santmire would, as does Moltmann, fit the category anti-modernising provincialism; whereas Fox would join McFague in the category anti-modernising secularism.

Other relevant points that have been made are in the area of ethics and personhood and include the conclusion that "a cosmic christology necessarily entails an ethic of care for creation,"<sup>394</sup> and that since "man's life as a person is so intimately bound up with his life as a physical creature, it follows that cosmic redemption is an implicate of the idea of personal redemption."<sup>395</sup> David Fergusson also makes the soteriological point, from the context of evolution in which inevitably there are both 'winners and losers':

Soteriology must therefore be understood not in terms of the revelation of an inherent dynamic within the process of life. It must be seen as a reordering and redeeming of all that has been destroyed, wasted and lost in natural as well as in social history...the Christ of Ephesians and Colossians is the one through whom all things are created and in whom all things find their appointed end.<sup>396</sup>

When Moltmann calls for a cosmic Christ for us today, he is calling for a christology to "confront Christ the redeemer with a nature which human beings have plunged into chaos, infected with poisonous waste and condemned to universal death; for it is only this Christ who can save men and women from their despair and preserve nature from annihilation."<sup>397</sup> These are the concerns of christology and soteriology, inextricably bound up together. He is not discussing the kerygmatic and pastoral deliverance of human beings from their destructiveness and fears. Neither is his interest merely an ethical concern to somehow preserve 'nature' from the fate of a return to chaos. Moltmann's cosmic christology is concerned with the person of Christ on the way to fulfil his

<sup>392</sup> Fox's work was briefly discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>393</sup> Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology", *op. cit.*

<sup>394</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, *op. cit.* 65, summarising Loren Wilkinson, "Cosmic Christology and the Christian's Role in Creation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11 (1981): 18-40.

<sup>395</sup> Allen Galloway, *The Cosmic Christ*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 204-05, cited Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, *op. cit.* 65.

<sup>396</sup> David Fergusson, *The Cosmos and the Creator* (London: SPCK, 1998) 75-6.

<sup>397</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 275.

messianic mission of reconciliation: God's ultimate goal of redemption. The ways in which he attempts to construe the redemption of nature are the subject of the next chapter.



#### **Chapter 4: Accounts of Atonement in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology: cosmic suffering as ecological soteriology**

Moltmann's theology does not begin with concepts of God or with any existential situation; rather he moves from the particular history of the scriptural witness to a more universal proposal to address a general interpretation of reality. This interpretation of reality will be concerned with what he observes and analyses as the various sufferings in the world. Then he re-articulates this particular biblical history in the light of the contemporary cultural context and addresses the misery he sees there. His concern is christological, the question that underlies his proposals is Bonhoeffer's formulation: 'Who really is Christ for us today?' And of course, the question is the primary shaper of the answer, hence the 'today' stresses the present; the secondary shaper - surely contingent on and entailed by the first - is the notion of political theology as a necessary hermeneutical category.

And for Moltmann, ecological theology is included under the general rubric of 'political theology',<sup>398</sup> insofar as he construes this as a response to the various 'fundamental contradictions', as he puts it, of the contemporary cultural context. He answers Bonhoeffer's question thus:

We shall not consider merely what is allegedly 'incomplete' about this civilization, and its so-called 'residual risk'. We shall look at its fundamental contradictions, in order to align the soteriological aspect of christology towards the total misery of the present. Every theology has to enter into the changing conditions of the culture in which it is pursued, perceiving and developing its own

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<sup>398</sup> Carl Schmitt's term originally. Schmitt - who was a constitutional lawyer - inaugurated the 'old' political theology in 1922, which in essence was a form of legitimation of political forms. Moltmann explains, "[H]e sought to demonstrate that all political concepts in history in support of the state were secularized theological concepts and thus that there was always a parallel correspondence between the theological and the political paradigm of the time. Schmitt himself then developed his own constitutional theory from the 'state of emergency' to support the dictatorship thought necessary in the fight for political existence between friend and foe. The 'new' political theology rejected this form of religious politics and took its starting point from the subject of the church in society. The earlier theology of church politics had always been governed by an interest in preserving the status of the church in society and in extending church power and influence. We began with a critique of this church politics by asking about the origin and legitimation of the church in the name of Christ and making Jesus' message of the kingdom of God for the poor the starting point of a politics of consistent discipleship." This 'new' political theology in Europe emerged out of the Christian-Marxist dialogue in the 1960s. By 'we' Moltmann is referring to Johann Baptist Metz and himself in dialogue with Ernst Bloch. *History and the Triune God* *op. cit.* 178. Political theology might be understood here as an attempt to respond positively to the challenges wrought by modernity characterised by the market economy, science, technology, industrialisation, urbanisation and the burgeoning state.



concern in those conditions...It is not simply if it feels like it, that Christian theology concerns itself with the crises and contradictions of scientific and technological civilization, and the people who suffer from them. It *has* to make these things its concern.<sup>399</sup>

Moltmann's language-use is interesting here. For since he would want to say that God is seen in God's *contradiction*, that is, in what God is radically not, it seems that he regards these 'fundamental contradictions' in society as precisely *revelatory*. Is he then experiencing the misery in the world as somehow disclosive, in the sense of being the perpetual cry from the cross to act and to speak out prophetically? If so, God discloses God's face in the sufferings of the world, as a way of calling us to discipleship, to obedience to the will of God, to seek justice and to do the good.

Moltmann is also saying here that the issue of salvation changes with time and thus soteriological theory is never final, but must be reformulated to address contemporary hopes and understanding of reality. But this must be undertaken on the basis that any salvation discussed, if it is to be Christian, must be the salvation of Christ as witnessed in scriptural history; as he puts it, this criterion "means that christological statements have to be verified as originating historically and substantially in the Bible."<sup>400</sup>

But, as he goes on to say, christology becomes sterile rapidly if it remains locked in this notion of 'origin' hermeneutics despite its being according to Scripture; certainly it may test its statements against the biblical testimony about Jesus, 'but it would no longer be able to relate these statements therapeutically to people in the wretchedness of their present situation'. However, he warns against the one-sidedness of considering only christology's effects despite their potential therapeutic value, for we should then run the risk of losing the distinctive identity of Christianity which itself lies in its historical particularity, that is, in its origins.

Moltmann expresses this tension by distinguishing between a hermeneutics of origins and a hermeneutics of effects, which stresses the necessary relation of the identity and relevance of Christianity. Furthermore it brings into sharp focus the logically prior issue of the identity of Jesus the Christ, the one who was there in the beginning, and the one who is the first born of the dead. Moltmann's

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<sup>399</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 64.

<sup>400</sup> *ibid.* . 43



historical/eschatological approach to christology is grounded firmly in the biblical understanding of Christ as God's suffering servant, culminating with the crucifixion. Christ continues in this role from the right hand of the Father; hence Moltmann's understanding of Romans 8: "the sufferings of dying nature are 'Christ's sufferings' too, and where dying nature is concerned, 'Christ's sufferings' are surely to be discerned as birth pangs of a new earth on which righteousness will dwell."<sup>401</sup> Taking Ephesians 1.20f as his departure point, Moltmann finds that the lordship of the risen Christ was acknowledged already in cosmic terms in apostolic times: God has given Christ lordship over the whole world, not just human history and the Church.<sup>402</sup> Moltmann's understanding of the cosmic ministry of Christ is always already defined through his trinitarian account of God, creation, Spirit and the eschatological future of all things, and with his construal of the omnipresent Christ as suffering servant he invokes the notion of a 'Christ-pervaded cosmos':

If Christ is the first born of the dead, then he cannot be merely 'the new Adam' of a new humanity. He must also be understood as the firstborn of the whole creation. All things are created in the vista that stretches forward to the messiah, for the messiah will redeem all things for their own truth, and will gather them for the kingdom of God, thus completing and perfecting creation. But this means that the risen Christ is not present only in the Spirit of faith and in the Spirit that animates the community of the people. Nor is he present merely in hidden form in world history. He is also immanently efficacious in 'the heart of creation', as Teilhard de Chardin put it. He is present not only in the human victims of world history but in victimized nature too.<sup>403</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, Moltmann has rejected the old cosmological christology, in particular the credal or patristic christologies that were predicated on rather static hierarchical construals of creation; these do not give expression adequately to an eschatological vision. He rejects also the modern anthropological christologies which, although very different in content, contribute to a similar result, ie. overlook the cosmic lordship of Christ. This cosmic lordship means for Moltmann that Christ fills heaven and earth with the glory of his resurrection life and will renew the universe. Specifically, three things are inherent in this vision: *creatio originalis* - Christ as ground of the creation of all things; *creatio continua* - Christ as moving power in the evolution of creation; *creatio nova* - Christ as

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<sup>401</sup> *ibid.* 194.

<sup>402</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* 172.

<sup>403</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 278-9.



redeemer of the whole creation process.<sup>404</sup> This eschatological cosmic christology, what Moltmann calls his 'christology in the eschatological history of God',<sup>405</sup> has been developed through dialogue with Karl Rahner's 'Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World' in Theological Investigations V and Teilhard de Chardin's Christianity and Evolution. Moltmann approves of the wide scope of their christologies, but rejects their basic premiss of the modern evolutionary paradigm. Essentially Moltmann's cosmic christology is a universal eschatology of redemption in which the consummation of all things in the Kingdom of God is a glorious eschatological transformation, and not the end process of a development of teleology.

What has to be called eschatological is the movement of *redemption*, which runs counter to evolution. If we want to put it in temporal terms: this is a movement which runs from the future to the past, not from the past to the future. It is the divine tempest of the new creation, which sweeps out of God's future over history's fields of the dead, waking and gathering every last created being. The rising of the dead, the gathering of the victims and the seeking of the lost bring a redemption of the world which no evolution can ever achieve. This redemption therefore comprehends the redemption of evolution itself, with all its ambiguities.<sup>406</sup>

Moltmann does not claim to be rethinking atonement doctrine in his discussion of redemption. But as a 'theologian of the cross' for whom the sufferings of the crucified Christ are 'discerned as birth pangs of a new earth on which righteousness will dwell', he must surely be working with an understanding of the event of the cross in some way that entails the logic of atonement, even if he himself does not specifically invoke these categories. He is clear in stating the centrality of the crucified and raised Christ in his eschatological christology:

Every consciously Christian idea about the eschatological new creation of all things will take its bearings from the raising of the crucified Christ. Eschatological questions receive a christological answer first of all, because this can be given with certainty. It is not another Christ who has taken the place of the dead Jesus. It is the same Jesus who appeared to the disciples, women and men, in the radiance of God's glory and identified himself through the marks of the nails as the one crucified. It is the crucified body which through the raising became the 'glorified body' (Phil.3.21).

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<sup>404</sup> *ibid.* 286.

<sup>405</sup> *ibid.* 70.

<sup>406</sup> *ibid.* 303.



God raised the 'form of a servant' to his divine form (Phil.2.5-11). So in him and with him the eschatological new creation of all things has already begun .... If from this future we look back to creation in the beginning, we perceive that all created beings are *true promises* of this, their own future in the kingdom of God, and we see in what way. They all point beyond themselves into this future. If we look at the history of the creation, then God's preservation of creation is directed towards this, its new creation. In his providence his promise is concealed.<sup>407</sup>

The analyses<sup>408</sup> following in this chapter concern the account of atonement that underlies Moltmann's original discussion of the God who suffers - for the crucified God is also the saving God - and the kinds of moves he has made in this respect since focusing his attention on ecological issues.<sup>409</sup> The basis for these analyses is the account of atonement present in The Crucified God,<sup>410</sup> Moltmann's seminal statement of a suffering God. Though not a claimed objective to address the issue of atonement, his premiss that "(T)he death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology"<sup>411</sup> implies an account of atonement. For Moltmann, the cross is precisely the crucial departure point from which to discuss the doctrine of God; and it is the cross that is directly the foundation of Christian hope for justice and life. So in a very real sense this particular account is paradigmatic of Moltmann's understanding of atonement.

In The Crucified God, Moltmann makes a distinctive attempt to articulate and make intelligible a way of understanding the enduring significance of the cross. He asks two fundamental questions: first, what are the sufferings and the cross of Christ? And secondly, what form do the mission and cross of Christ take as a present reality? His starting point is to try to interpret faithfully the Pauline material, particularly in Romans, and he is responding both to Bultmann's existentialism<sup>412</sup> and to the critical theory of The Frankfurt School. Moltmann is engaging with what he calls "the only serious atheism - the atheism of Camus and

<sup>407</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, Science and Wisdom, transl. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2003) 51-3.

<sup>408</sup> Aspects of this analysis have been published in the following article: Dee Carter, "Foregrounding the Environment: The Redemption of Nature and Jürgen Moltmann's Theology," Ecotheology 10 (2001): 70-84.

<sup>409</sup> In particular, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.*, and God in Creation, *op. cit.* Also The Future of Creation, *op. cit.* although the themes introduced here were developed later in God in Creation.

<sup>410</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.*

<sup>411</sup> *ibid.* 204.

<sup>412</sup> Moltmann may not be directly in dialogue with Rudolf Bultmann, but he was influenced quite considerably by his own teachers, in particular by Ernst Käsemann who was himself a pupil of Bultmann and whose work was in conflictual dialogue with Bultmann. For a discussion of the influence exerted on Moltmann's work by his professors, see M. Douglas Meeks, The Origins of Theology of Hope (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).



Horkheimer, of the 'metaphysical revolt', and of the 'longing for righteousness'; that is, the atheism which, with Bloch, we can term atheism for the sake of God."<sup>413</sup> He is responding to the critique that brings to the bar of reason the possibility of a just God in the face of the world's suffering, and finds it wanting.

It is Moltmann's reaction both to Bultmann and to the Critical Theorists that shapes his own proposals in answer to the questions he has set. Indeed Moltmann welcomes these provocative discourses for they compel theology to begin christologically and so to speak of God in the context of the death of Jesus. For Moltmann, any theology must answer the cry from the cross, and as it does so, it will necessarily serve as a critique of both the church and society. He is concerned with orthopraxy, that is, action and experience meaningful only in the context of living relationships. Reflection on the cross will thus be critical, liberating theology, challenging convention within the church itself, and in the wider society.

Critical theology and critical theory ... encounter each other in the context of the open, unanswerable question of suffering and in the inescapable question of justice. Critical Christians and critical atheists can find here a practical solidarity in the world. In this context of the suffering of the world, what is the significance of the remembrance of the suffering of Christ? <sup>414</sup>

Moltmann is making a strong restatement for a trinitarian doctrine of God, for essentially he wishes to take issue with certain 'monotheistic' ideas which he regards as monarchism, in that God is construed as sharply transcendent and unchangeable, a divine ruler who at once reflects and shapes undemocratic forms. Specifically for Moltmann, the horrors of the Holocaust demand an understanding of God who suffers in and with his creation; a trinitarian God of interconnectedness whose relationships also suffer breakage in a context of evil, and a God who must be construed therefore both as suffering and in protest. 'Traditional theism' and 'traditional atheism' provide no answers: Moltmann argues that by justifying the world as it is as God's world, its suffering is by-passed; while if the ground is cut from under the question of suffering, people will stop asking absolute questions about meaning and justice and adapt in

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<sup>413</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," transl. K. Crim, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (July 1972): 278 - 299. For Moltmann, Christianity is the only 'true atheism': to believe in the Christian God is to have no gods.

<sup>414</sup> *ibid.*



acquiescence.<sup>415</sup> Theology of the Cross is Moltmann's response to this demand, for the Cross, as symbol "...is an invitation to understand the Christ hanging on the cross as the 'outstretched' God of the Trinity."<sup>416</sup> To his own first question, that is, what are the suffering and cross of Christ and of those who follow him, Moltmann cites agreement with Bultmann's understanding of the cross: that is, by giving up Jesus to be crucified, God has set up the cross for us.

To believe in the cross of Christ does not mean to concern ourselves with a mythical process wrought outside of us and our world or with an objective event turned to our advantage, but rather to make the cross of Christ our own, to undergo crucifixion with him.<sup>417</sup>

For Moltmann, like Bultmann, the cross is an eschatological event; that is, not just an event of the past, on which to reflect, but an event whose actuality and meaning transcends time and is an ever-present reality. While Moltmann agrees here with Bultmann, and also affirms his protest against any objectification and historicisation of the cross as a mere past event, he ultimately finds Bultmann's understanding to be "deprived of any significance of its own, and to obtain historical significance only in the existential process of being crucified with Christ."<sup>418</sup> He parts company with Bultmann at the point where he finds clearly that Bultmann offers no adequate answer to the second question he has posed. For Bultmann, "the preaching of the cross as the event of redemption challenges all who hear it to appropriate this significance for themselves, to be willing to be crucified with Christ."<sup>419</sup>

This has a too subjective stress which is inadequate for Moltmann and he argues that this justifies the justifying judgement of God only in a secondary sense; it does not give expression to the Pauline maxim that Christ died for us, as sinners, as the ungodly, as helpless (Romans 5:6,8). And it is this Pauline idea, that Christ died 'for us', that Moltmann wishes to make sense of, and therefore (Bultmannian) private *imitatio Christi* is not enough.

Our crucifixion with Christ is enabled and made effective only on the basis of

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<sup>415</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>416</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op.cit.* 207.

<sup>417</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology' in HW Bartsch (ed.) *Kerygma and Myth* (SPCK, 1953) 36f, cited Moltmann *The Crucified God* *op. cit.* 60-1.

<sup>418</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *ibid.* 61

<sup>419</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology' *op. cit.* cited Moltmann, *ibid.*



God's self-disclosure in his contradiction, in the one abandoned by God, in the death of Christ for his enemies, the godforsaken and godless. Thus the significance of the cross is not derived from the crucifixion of the believer with Christ, but in the reverse: the crucifixion of the believer with Christ is meaningful only in the context of Christ's death on the cross for the godless. It is God the Son revealed as abandoned by God the Father, and the acceptance of the godless by Christ as he accepts his own abandonment, that brings sinners into relationship with the crucified Christ, and enables their liberation.

It is surely Moltmann's stress on the justification of the godless and godforsaken that invites some consideration of how Moltmann is relating cross and resurrection. For, as he asserts, "(T)he Christian belief in the resurrection ... (proclaims)..the nucleus of a new righteousness in a world where dead and living cry out for righteousness."<sup>420</sup> A key feature of Moltmann's theology is his use of the cross of the risen Christ as a paradigm. It was Moltmann's experience as a prisoner of war that has been a profoundly influential shaper of his later theological reflection, as he came to see the resurrection as the sign of God's protest against suffering. Faith had taught him how to hope, to feel restless and to suffer in solidarity with others. In The Crucified God the emphasis is on the cross, though retaining a sense of future resurrection, and the link between them renders reason for hope in the face of suffering. "The cross is a protection against enthusiastic hopes, and unless hope is born out of the cross, it becomes superstition."<sup>421</sup>

Moltmann is trying thus to express the cross as "the present form of the resurrection for the resurrection is only indirectly, but the meaning of the cross is directly, the foundation of Christian hope for justice and life."<sup>422</sup> But resurrection pulls reality forward, and to understand the cross as the cross of the risen Christ requires an eschatological reading of history, a reversed sense of time. Moltmann anticipates the incarnation of the future of that redeeming kingdom in the past of Christ crucified. In his rejection of Bultmann, Moltmann placed importance on an objective understanding of atonement. In his embrace of the basic New Testament idea of Christ as representative for us, he is stressing an objective account of substitution and he develops this systematically from the concept of prolepsis used for the resurrection.

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<sup>420</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 177.

<sup>421</sup> *ibid.* 82

<sup>422</sup> Jürgen Moltmann Religion, Revolution and the Future transl. MD Meeks (NY: Scribner's, 1969), 53.



Through his suffering and death, the Christ who was raised from the dead *before us* becomes the Christ *for us*, ... His prolepsis forms the basis of his pro-existence and in it becomes significant for us. Only when the one who was raised proleptically takes our place and dies does his prolepsis have saving significance for us... Thus the cross of Christ modifies the resurrection of Christ under the conditions of the suffering of the world so that it changes from being a purely future event to being an event of liberating love. Through his death the risen Christ introduces the coming reign of God into the godless present by means of representative suffering.<sup>423</sup>

Surin<sup>424</sup> describes Moltmann's account as one of penal substitution, citing Moltmann's claim that God took upon himself the unforgivable sin and guilt for which there is no atonement, along with the rejection and anger that cannot be turned away, so that we might become, in Christ, God's righteousness in the world. Certainly at times Moltmann writes in a penal vein, when he expresses the idea of representation: "God takes the judgement on the sin of man himself. He assigns to himself the fate that men should by rights endure."<sup>425</sup> He is here showing the influence of Luther, on whose theory Christ's death secures our salvation because he 'clothed himself in the sins of humanity' and thence God 'inflicted' upon him the sufferings they deserved.

Nevertheless Moltmann's God who suffers has not remained passive in the cross of Christ. Rather Moltmann has it that in the death of the Son, pain comes also upon the Father himself. As a consequence, the death on the cross involves an intratrinitarian event, which renders a change in God's own life, a *stasis* within the Godhead. Moltmann is thus contributing to controversy between Christian theology and metaphysical concepts of God which stress impassibility. For Moltmann, these concepts simply underpin the god of pagans in contradistinction to the notion of the Christian God, which was itself from early times articulated by trinitarian doctrine. And for him, it is the modern downplay of this doctrine that is symptomatic of Christian assimilation to the functionality of the idols of national, political religions of society.

The position that Moltmann is trying to establish is that the Cross is not simply part of the movements of history, but is the paradigm which institutes God's universal suffering: "the trinitarian God-event on the Cross becomes the history of

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<sup>423</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 184-5.

<sup>424</sup> Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 128.

<sup>425</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 193.



God".<sup>426</sup> God is hurt in his own being and it is this effect that Moltmann uses to underpin the claim that the Cross has universal redeeming possibilities. Thus Moltmann is working with an objective account of atonement, whereby a change is wrought through the Cross, in its agent. In terms of atonement logic, this objective account is one both of representation and substitution, the latter tending to the penal. The framework is, in a strong sense, one of the atonement metaphor of justice and this is clear in Moltmann's stress on righteousness and the justification, wrought by Christ, of the godless and the godforsaken. He writes:

If the resurrection has already been anticipated in him, then 'resurrection, life and righteousness' come through the death of this one man in favour of those who have been delivered over to death through their unrighteousness. Through his suffering and death, the risen Christ brings righteousness and life to the unrighteous and dying...He anticipates the coming righteousness of God under the conditions of human injustice in the law of grace and in the justification of the godless by his death...Therefore in him can be found reconciliation in the midst of strife and hope for the overcoming of strife...Thus his death on the cross 'for us' makes us sinners and godless and at the same time righteous and sons of God.<sup>427</sup>

The motif of the metaphor of victory is apparent here also, but is really no more than that: Moltmann's account is framed in justice, to be sure. But inevitably, as Colin Gunton has shown, the metaphors "converge and combine as their users attempt to express the meaning of different aspects of the atonement."<sup>428</sup> And similarly, although Moltmann rejects outright an understanding of atonement in terms of sacrifice, its language creeps in nevertheless: for example, when he says, that the "anticipation of the resurrection of the dead in (Christ) gains its saving significance for us only through his offering for us on the cross."<sup>429</sup> In terms of the mode of mediation of atonement to us, the logic is of both identification and imputation:

To understand the representative significance of his death is to understand his resurrection. In his dying for us the risen Christ looks on us and draws us into his life. In the one who became poor for our sake, God's riches are opened up for us. In the one who became a servant for our sake, we are

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<sup>426</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 255

<sup>427</sup> *ibid.* 185-187.

<sup>428</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op.cit.* 105.

<sup>429</sup> Jürgen Moltmann The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 184.



grasped by God's freedom. In the one who became sin for us, sinners become the righteousness of God in the world.... He took upon himself the unforgivable sin for which there is no atonement, together with the rejection and anger that cannot be turned away, so that in Christ we might become his righteousness in the world.<sup>430</sup>

Moltmann resolutely rejects sacrificial ideas as purely expiatory and merely backward looking. Because Moltmann confines sacrifice to the notion of "expiatory offering for our sins ... in the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple", he finds no "intrinsic theological connection with the kerygma of the resurrection."<sup>431</sup> Arguably he might benefit from a more nuanced appreciation of the many-sided character of sacrifice, but given that he finds it retrospective in character, it is not surprising he chooses not to use this metaphor as any kind of a frame for his reversed sense of time, his clearly eschatological thrust.

But Moltmann does connect the unique constituting event and its later effects, and this connection is in the realm of subjective human response. So God delivers up his son *in order* to be the Father of those who are delivered up;<sup>432</sup> and we are then *enabled* to respond *via* affirmation that God suffers with humanity. Moltmann considers that the psychological effect of this can be far-reaching. Moreover we are enabled to be transformed by emptying the self to become a new self, with the courage to be different from others in order to exist ultimately for others, and achieve true selfhood. Moltmann argues that to recognise and believe in God in Christ, powerless and crucified, in suffering and death, will liberate persons from the pursuit of compulsive self-interest, itself a false reality of inauthentic human existence.

Moltmann is arguing then that the cross is an event of God, acting in himself and suffering in himself. He is following Althaus for whom Christology which understands the death of Jesus as the death of God "must take up the elements of truth which are to be found in kenoticism (the doctrine of God's emptying of himself)."<sup>433</sup> That is, it may not simply construe a dialectical relation between the divine being and the human being, that leaves each unaffected. Moltmann agrees

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<sup>430</sup> *ibid.* 186, 192.

<sup>431</sup> *ibid.* 183.

<sup>432</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 10.

<sup>433</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Kenosis', *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* III, 1244-6, cited in Moltmann, *The Crucified God* *op. cit.* 205. In a sense, Moltmann perhaps subsumes basic sacrificial ideas under the category of kenosis; the Spirit is poured out on all flesh. (In this connection here, though, essentially human flesh.)

with Althaus that Christology must engage seriously with God entering into the suffering of the Son and in so doing remain completely God: "That this is the case, that God enters into the hiddenness of his Godhead beneath the human nature, is kenosis."<sup>434</sup> But Moltmann moves further to affirm the kenosis of the Son to death on the cross as an event in trinitarian terms: the cross reveals the relationships between Father and Son and enables the movement of the Spirit from the Father to us. As he says,

...we have to speak of the persons in their special relationship in this event...The Father's pain is the death of the Son...The Son is the one who is abandoned by the Father and the one who gives himself in self-surrender...The Spirit is the Spirit of surrender of the Father and the Son. He is creative love proceeding out of the Father's pain and the Son's self-surrender and coming to forsaken human beings in order to open to them a future for life.<sup>435</sup>

With this move Moltmann achieves two related things: first, he has rejected the axiom of God's impassibility, and secondly he has rendered the death of Jesus as not simply disclosive, but as entailing also that in the cross God "constitutes himself"<sup>436</sup> as suffering love. Moltmann works this out biblically through the New Testament *paredoken* formulae of love and (self)-surrender. In discussing Galatians 2.20 the notion of surrender is found with both the Father and the Son as subject, that is not only the Father gives Jesus up, but the Son also gives himself, and Moltmann finds that this expresses clearly a deep common purpose. "But this inner unity of Jesus and his God is expressed at the point of their total separation - when God abandons the Son of God on the cross."<sup>437</sup>

And so Moltmann is here drawing again surely on the concept of God revealed in contradiction - in what God is radically not; '...unity in separation and separation in unity are one in the crucifixion.' He discusses this further in terms of Pauline and Johannine texts that bring together the ideas of love and (self)-surrender (or abandonment), for example, Romans 8, John 3.16; Moltmann extrapolates 1 John 4.16 to see in this event of love the existence of God himself. Thus -

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<sup>434</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *ibid.* 206.

<sup>435</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God" *op. cit.* 294.

<sup>436</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 244.

<sup>437</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God" *op. cit.* 293.



...his existence is constituted in the event of this love seen in the abandonment and surrender of Jesus on the cross...In the cross the Father and the Son are totally separated by the abandonment of Jesus and at the same time intimately united in surrender....The unity of this account of Father, Son and Spirit on the cross can then *a posteriori* be termed "God." The word "God" means an event, precisely this event...God's deity is to be developed out of this occurrence...between Father, Son, and Spirit and out of which the concept "God" is constituted, not only for men but also for God himself.<sup>438</sup>

Moltmann's account of God constituting himself as suffering love gives rise to two discussions in particular: first, the problems inherent in a declaration of a passible God, and second, the notion that somehow Moltmann is using 'suffering' as a kind of underlying, working atonement metaphor.<sup>439</sup> To consider the first issue, albeit of necessity, relatively in brief.<sup>440</sup>

This move to a suffering God is far from unproblematic. Gunton argues strongly that the "doctrine of the impassibility of God has a far more complex history than its more naive opponents are these days liable to acknowledge."<sup>441</sup> Given that Gunton uses Moltmann as an example of one with whom to take issue on this matter, it seems reasonable to assume that he is included among the 'naive opponents'. Gunton argues strongly that traditional Platonic claims to God's impassibility are based on 'perfectly respectable arguments against the anthropomorphic characterisations of the gods of Olympus' and the implicit danger to their moral credibility should they be capable of succumbing to 'unruly passions'.

For Gunton, the relevance of such a move for Christianity is that God is subjected to some kind of external necessity, entailing two subversive consequences: first, that the cross is not then necessarily a victory, rather that its outcome depends upon the completion by other agents of what it began; and secondly, the related point that it is then history, and not God who is the actual lord of things. Gunton

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<sup>438</sup> *ibid.* 295.

<sup>439</sup> This proposal was earlier mooted and discussed in my article: Dee Carter, "Foregrounding the Environment: The Redemption of Nature and Jürgen Moltmann's Theology," *op. cit.*

<sup>440</sup> For a very thorough survey and assessment of the issue of God's (im)passibility, see Thomas G Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000). In a close examination of the issues, Weinandy argues for a traditional model of impassibility.

<sup>441</sup> Colin Gunton, 'The Being and Attributes of God. Eberhard Jüngel's Dispute with the Classical Philosophical Tradition' in John Webster (ed.), *The Possibilities of Theology*, (T&T Clark: Edinburgh 1994) 9.

cites Henry Chadwick that "the point of the patristic doctrine of impassibility is that it shows that God cannot be pushed around."<sup>442</sup>

Moltmann's account certainly does raise problems. First, it could be asked whether the problem of suffering is in anyway resolved by this intratrinitarian manoeuvre:<sup>443</sup> does a suffering God make suffering any less unacceptable? But, in fairness to Moltmann, he attempts no solution to the problem of unjust suffering. He offers no theodicy in the sense of an apologetic for suffering and evil in the world. Rather I shall suggest that he offers an atonement metaphor. He wants to say that a concept of a God who suffers in his own being offers hope to those in pain because God has taken their hurt into himself through his identification with suffering in and through Christ on the cross. Moltmann is following the early Luther in denying the tension between the revealed God of grace and the hidden God of otherness and transcendence, insofar as his very revealedness is itself his concealment in the humiliation of the cross: that is, God is at once *absconditus* and *revelatus* in the cross.

Thus for Moltmann, the dialectic is not between God as untouched essence and God *absconditus*, but instead is between the Father and the Son; he expresses their supreme and shared suffering such that the "Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father."<sup>444</sup> So Moltmann has moved to the notion of the Father present in the cross and identified in bereavement with the Son who has been delivered up in solidarity with all humanity. In theodical terms the cross is where God is seen with us in suffering. The idea of shared grief may offer some comfort but nevertheless an offer of hope may require more than for God to grieve for and with us. It needs also the dialectic of God in himself as guarantor of righteousness; that is, a God who cannot be pushed around.

A further rather serious objection,<sup>445</sup> is that, by the importation of the cross and every trace of suffering into the Godhead, Moltmann has, in effect, collapsed the distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. As he puts it himself:

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<sup>442</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Possibilities of Theology*, *op. cit.* 9.

<sup>443</sup> Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* *op. cit.* 130.

<sup>444</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 243

<sup>445</sup> Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* *op. cit.* 131



We have interpreted the cross in a trinitarian manner as an event occurring in the relationship between persons, in which these persons are constituted in their relationship to each other and so constitute themselves...an occurrence between Jesus and his Father within their relationship in the Trinity, in the Godhead: this approach overcomes the old dichotomy between an immanent and a functional Trinity and between the general nature of God and his inner triune nature. The functional Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity (Karl Rahner), the Trinity *is* the nature of God.<sup>446</sup>

Indeed then, for Moltmann, the economic Trinity is the *ground* of the immanent Trinity, and thus God's life changes with the movements of world history, and Surin clearly sees much merit in Moltmann's "commendable intention to secure the accessibility of the being of God to human history."<sup>447</sup> But has this not rendered God rather too available, potentially reduced to the world's history of suffering? Gunton, however, is critical of the way Moltmann "consciously uses the principle of immanence to cast doubt upon the propriety of speaking of an immanent trinity at all, preferring to speak of 'the Trinitarian history of God'."<sup>448</sup> He concedes that in The Crucified God there is no unrelieved immanence, for Moltmann does indeed speak of Jesus' death as death *in* God rather than as death *of* God; but for Gunton this is far from adequate and he finds Moltmann too near to making the cross of Christ a general principle of immanence.

On the other hand, it might be argued that a suffering God is a genuinely biblical model. Fiorenza denies this, finding no grounds for inferring, from the various views within the New Testament of Jesus' relation to the Father and of the meaning of his death on the cross, any construal of a trinitarian theology of the pain of God. He does make a logical point:

The claim that the death of Jesus entails a revolution and a revision of the classical Greek metaphysical idea of God entails a contradiction when it is based upon the New Testament. The distinction between the Father and Jesus is such that it would be unthinkable for a New Testament author that the suffering of Jesus would involve a suffering of the Father because of an identity of nature between Father and Son. It is precisely the hellenistic metaphysical thinking with its concepts of substance and nature that maintain such an identification. To criticise Hellenistic

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<sup>446</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God", *op. cit.*

<sup>447</sup> Kenneth Surin, Theology and the Problem of Evil *op. cit.* 131

<sup>448</sup> Colin Gunton, The Possibilities of Theology, *op. cit.* 14



metaphysical thinking while at the same time basing a presupposition of one's critique on the thought patterns of that very system is, to say the least, not consistent.<sup>449</sup>

However, it is far from clear that we can have access to quite what 'a New Testament author' would find thinkable or unthinkable, and Christian theologising is not constrained by the perceived thought world of the biblical writers, however well-informed that perception. Moreover, Fiorenza finds no warrant either in the Old Testament, thereby overlooking that the anthropomorphic God of Genesis (6.6) 'grieved to his heart'. But Moltmann's theology has a therapeutic thrust, and there are advantages in collapsing the distinction between God as he is 'in himself' and God as he is 'for us'. For while identifying God's life entirely with victims has problems, it does at least have an advantage over the notion of God in his essence as the object of his own salvific work insofar as it avoids opening a contradiction within God's trinitarian life. Is it not so, that to deny a concept of a suffering God is to draw an unwanted and unhelpful distinction between the persons of the Trinity?

Nevertheless, the question itself seems to be suggesting an unenviable choice between a concept of God who 'in himself' is concerned with a need for justice because of offence to him, and an idea of God who is identified with the victim but who leaves those who suffer bereft of a court of appeal beyond that suffering. Walker is right that the "Father both suffers the loss of the Son and hears the Son's cry"<sup>450</sup> for at the cross there is a dialogue between God 'for us' in our suffering and God 'in himself' whose justice and righteousness, in the Hebrew sense, stand over against that suffering, hear the cry and vindicate the cause. Again, we speak here surely of a God who cannot be pushed around.

In a way Moltmann does make the move that a crucified God is also one of an otherness that guarantees not only absolute love to enfold our partial love, but also constant righteousness to reverse injustice. Moltmann does stress indeed the justification of the godless and godforsaken. Is he not here reflective of Luther in

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<sup>449</sup> Francis Fiorenza, "Joy and Pain as Paradigmatic for Language about God," *Concilium* 5 (May, 1974): 67-80.

<sup>450</sup> Michael Walker, "The Atonement and Justice," *Theology* May (1988): 180-6. Walker's concern here is to argue for differentiated rights to justice claims based on differentiated levels of culpability. He rejects the notion of humankind as a 'lumpen mass' of an undifferentiated degree of fallenness. His concern is not beyond the human creation but is not the idea that not only God, but also his creation (in a different and differentiated sense) have claims to justice potentially useful regarding the non-human?



his theology of justification? According to Luther, God's righteousness is that according to which he justifies rather than punishes the godless: that is, God's justice is that which renders salvation through means other than punishing offence. As Gunton<sup>451</sup> says, Luther reaches here the heart of the point and in doing so introduces a positive contribution to the tradition.

And here in The Crucified God is Moltmann on justification, demonstrating this positive understanding of the justification of the godless and godforsaken: "...Jesus broke through legalistic apocalyptic, because he proclaimed *justitia justificans* rather than *justitia distributiva* as the righteousness of the kingdom of God, and anticipated it in the law of grace among the unrighteous and those outside the law."<sup>452</sup>

He seems to offer a rather punitive reading of Paul's understanding of judgement, though it is, in itself, something of a paraphrase of Romans 1. One might wonder how (the earlier?) Moltmann would interpret, for example, the Genesis stories of God's desire for reconciled relationships, when he offers his account of Pauline theology of 'God's wrath and judgment'; he writes that:

God's wrath over the godlessness of men is revealed in that God abandons them to their unrighteousness...Men who forsake God are forsaken by God...Judgment consists in God's giving men up to the corruption which they themselves have chosen and in abandoning them there. He gives the Jews up to their legalism, the heathen to their idolatry, and all people to their self-willed compulsion to die.<sup>453</sup>

But perhaps Moltmann chooses to stress this negative aspect of abandonment in order to contrast it with God's abandonment of Jesus on the cross; and to make clear the substitutionary, (and surely penal) understanding of the cross that he himself favours: "In the historical event of the cross, where Jesus was forsaken by his God, Paul sees eschatologically the Son surrendered by the Father for godless

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<sup>451</sup> Colin Gunton, The Dale Lecture, delivered at King's College, London, 23. 2. 95. 'The Cross and The City: R W Dale and the doctrine of the Atonement.' Dale finds an unresolved tension between this positive notion of justifying the godless alongside his penal substitutionary account. Gunton considers this may be too starkly stated.

<sup>452</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," *op. cit.* 292.

<sup>453</sup> *ibid.*

and godforsaken men. In that God did not spare his own Son we see revealed that sparing of all godless persons that is called 'love'."<sup>454</sup>

A further price paid as a result of the intake of suffering into the Godhead is the ontologisation of evil.<sup>455</sup> For if suffering and pain become part of the divine being, they must then necessarily have a positive value and yet they must also remain potent if they are to be what they are. The implications of this are far-reaching, and certainly Moltmann may be endowing suffering with a meaning it does not, and should not, have. It seems clear that Moltmann is equating the immanent Trinity with the economy of God's work in history, an equation demanded, as he sees it, by an incarnational theology of the Cross. He is somehow trying to develop an ontological idea of the inner life of God, not as something fixed, but from the history of Christ's suffering as 'a parable open to the eschaton'.

Morse <sup>456</sup> is helpful in clarifying what Moltmann is saying. While it may seem that he is suggesting that God's own being changes in the final consummation, collapsing the distinction between Creator and creature, Morse explains that "fulfilment should not be conceived either as everlasting *chronos* or as an abrogation and cessation of promise."<sup>457</sup> For God continues to promise his presence, that is, 'God's eternal presence is not all-consuming, but constantly self-covenanting and promissory, as revealed.'

Morse's exposition is, as he puts it, what he takes to be Moltmann's inherent logic. Nevertheless it may be seen as one possible interpretation of Moltmann's 'own more expansive language of metaphysical process' and not necessarily an adequate response to the difficulties raised by Gunton, who is arguably also concerned with the effect of a kenotic account of allowing a properly adequate role for justice if responsibility has been in a way transferred from humanity onto God. Human responsibility is fundamental for right relationships with God to be understood as a invitation to partnership and as a dialogue in freedom and grace.

Bauckham is helpful here in offering an explication of Moltmann's thought on God's passibility. In the preface he has written to the second edition of The Crucified God, Bauckham writes,

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<sup>454</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> Kenneth Surin, Theology and the Problem of Evil *op. cit.* 131.

<sup>456</sup> Christopher Morse, The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology *op. cit.* 122ff.

<sup>457</sup> *ibid.* 126.



... the impassibility of God, as conceived in classical theism, is rejected. What Moltmann criticizes here is not simply the belief that God cannot suffer, but more broadly the conviction that God cannot be affected by the world. God's love, in this classical definition of God's nature, is active benevolence, not a two-way relationship in which God can be affected by those God loves. What Moltmann is really concerned with is the understanding of God's *love* as God's *passion* (in the multiple sense of that word). He is therefore careful to define the sense in which God suffers. Not every kind of suffering that humans experience can be directly attributed to God. The Fathers were correct to see that God cannot suffer against God's will, out of weakness, as creatures do. God's suffering is the suffering entailed by love, the suffering God undertakes for the sake of those God loves. The 'passibility' of God, in the sense that God can be affected by God's creatures, means not only that God suffers with and for them but also that their salvation from evil, suffering and death brings God joy.<sup>458</sup>

This insightful discussion from Bauckham leads into the second implication of Moltmann's construal of a God who constitutes himself as suffering love: the proposal that in so doing, Moltmann seems to be employing 'suffering' as a kind of underlying atonement metaphor. Moltmann makes a quite particular move with his theory of soteriology, closely bound to his christology - itself his starting point for the doctrine of God. His statement of a God of suffering love holds the key. His account of atonement is quite clear, and the suffering love of God is his working idea. Arguably, Moltmann has construed suffering as an atonement metaphor and the clues are in the language he uses. This can be made particularly apparent by considering one of his reflections on the suffering of God. To the question he sets himself, 'what is the meaning of the horrible events at Golgotha?' he responds,

There are two answers to this question:

- 1) The *solidarity of God* with us (in other words, Golgotha happened in order for God to be *with us* in our suffering and in our pain);
- 2) *Substitutionary atonement* (in other words, Golgotha happened in order for God to be there *for us* in our guilt, to free us from its burden).<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Richard Bauckham, preface in Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, 2nd edition, transl. R A Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 2001) xii.

<sup>459</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Passion Of Christ And The Suffering Of God," Asbury Theological Journal 48/1 (Spring 1993): 19-28.



Taking these two responses together, the distinction between the 'with us' and the 'for us' is central, for it is the key to his attempt to establish access to God by God. The 'suffering love of God' is both 'for us' and 'with us'; that is, a truly suffering God is 'with us', and *in* suffering, is 'for us'. As such, there is both a God-ward and a human-ward direction. There is genuine efficacy in that God in Godself suffers: there is a solidarity in suffering for God. Also such suffering insists that God is *with us* in suffering - that is the human-wardness of God's suffering in solidarity with humanity; it is *for us* in the sense that the encounter of divine-human suffering in Christ gives access by God to humanity, even humanity in suffering. God's suffering is the *for us*-mode of access provided by God for human beings and is also the solidarity of God *with us*, the suffering humanity. Thus for Moltmann, suffering 'functions' as a kind of underlying working atonement metaphor.

But - it might be claimed - Moltmann's suffering God is an idea or concept, rather than a metaphor. Clearly it is indeed a concept: Moltmann is stating a particular understanding of God - he is theorising and hence conceptualising. But this concept functions metaphorically as well as being of itself a doctrinal statement. There is a need to avoid imposing a particular logic on what Moltmann might be doing. He himself does not explain, nor does he account for his own language use in these terms, and certainly if suffering in God can be understood *only* in a literal sense, then an argument for 'suffering' as an atonement metaphor cannot be made. To be sure, the basis of his account of suffering is the literal death of Christ. But this death is not the literal death of God: if Moltmann meant this, he would then be guilty of unrelieved immanence.<sup>460</sup> What we have is death *in*, not *of*, God.

The problem with 'concept' is that it connotes a certain preciseness or fixity; it is an abstract notion that attempts to generalise and that tends towards univocity. As Sallie McFague rightly points out, 'concept' itself is metaphorical in the sense that it is a construction, but it is at the far end of a developmental continuum: a metaphor, if it functions well as communication, it becomes a metaphor that sticks; this, in turn and with time, becomes a model or a dominant metaphor, and these become established eventually as theories and concepts. Thus the metaphorical roots of concepts are rarely exposed.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Colin Gunton finds some of Moltmann's language not quite convincing though. Gunton accepts that in Moltmann "there is no unrelieved immanence...(B)ut the relief from immanentism is far from adequate, so that Moltmann comes very near to making the cross of Jesus a general principle of immanence." *The Possibilities of Theology*, *op. cit.* 15.

<sup>461</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (London: SCM, 1983) 26.



As McFague points out, "(C)oncepts, unlike metaphors, do not create new meaning....concepts without images are sterile."<sup>462</sup> Surely Moltmann must have intended to be creative in his construal of a God who suffers. Are not his discussions of a suffering God replete with ambiguous, imagistic and multi-levelled language? Jean-Luc Marion argues persuasively in God Without Being for the notion of fixity inherent in 'concept' and its potentially idolatrous nature precisely because of this.<sup>463</sup> Essentially he is pressing to the limits, and indeed to the logical conclusion, the clear danger of 'naming' God, of talking about a 'god' called God, and this is the "idolatrous presupposition of every conceptual discourse on God, even the positive."<sup>464</sup> (Obviously, Marion has a particular agenda, that is, he is setting up a dichotomy: God with Being:God without Being as analogous to Idol:Icon.) Nevertheless his discussion on conceptual talk about God is interesting in itself, and potentially relevant here. He is saying that the 'concept' *names* "God", indeed *defines* God and hence 'knows the divine in its hold'.

Thus the concept, because it is something fixed, has the characteristics of the aesthetic idol: it apprehends the divine on the basis of *Dasein*, therefore it measures the divine as a function of itself. In his discussion of 'idol' Marion uses the idea of the way it fixes the gaze, and thus does not enable anything else to be seen; hence it sets the limits. This is unlike the icon, which opens up and widens the possibilities of the gaze. Marion employs the imagery of the mirror: "(T)hus does the mirror close the horizon, in order to offer sight the only object at which sight aims, namely, the face of its very aim: the gaze gazing at itself gazing...idolatrous vision mobilizes no other instance than itself."<sup>465</sup> (Marion must also necessarily know that we cannot avoid conceptual talk, but he is highlighting some of the baggage that goes with this. Furthermore he can turn the discussion into a critique of atheism: by moving from idolatry to conceptual atheism, he can argue that this is worth only as much as the concept that contains it.)

The point of this excursion into talk about God is to try to show that Moltmann would surely be unlikely to leave himself vulnerable to any charge of closedness or fixity, and he is also so aware of the possibility of idolatrous 'religion of society'

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<sup>462</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>463</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being (Chicago: University Press, 1991). See also Gareth Moore, Believing in God: a philosophical essay (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988). God is not to be understood by straining beyond what can be seen: "we speak of God in the absence of anything that is called God" 19.

<sup>464</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being *op. cit.* 33.

<sup>465</sup>*ibid.* 26.



that he would not wish to fall foul of any such critique of 'conceptual' discourse about God. Moltmann is trying somehow to express God's suffering not as a literal predication, but as part of his trinitarian vocabulary. Indeed is not Moltmann trying anyway to talk in terms of God revealing Godself as 'love', as 'suffering love'? And if this is the case, then clearly Moltmann is using 'love' analogically. While the basis is a literal death on the cross, the imagery that the cross then takes on for Moltmann cannot be understood in a literal way: he talks in terms of the cross 'containing' all the suffering of all of the history of the world, and all this suffering is 'taken up' into the cross. This is not language to be taken literally. Rather it is the language of creativity: an imagistic way of expressing how we might share in the life of God, and of the decisive role the cross plays as God's loving participation in our suffering.<sup>466</sup> When "the New Testament speaks of the life, and particularly the cross, of Jesus ... may it not be that we encounter not 'mere' metaphors but linguistic usages which demand a new way of thinking about and living in the world."<sup>467</sup>

Does this not represent the 'iconic', the opening-up, the *creation of* rather than the *product of* the gaze? Can the Suffering God 'idea' not reasonably be understood as metaphorical rather than as a concept? A passible God indeed may be ultimately unacceptable theologically to convinced exponents of the traditional impassibility, but nevertheless it seems to me that through his account of a God who suffers, Moltmann wishes to offer insights to partial forms of truth, rather than carve out potentially idolatrous concepts to be understood literally and 'fix the gaze'. It may be that 'suffering' in Moltmann is more appropriately construed as a form of analogical predication, in which case whether his various applications of the word suffering, linked by analogy, suggest a metaphorical use depends on whether analogy is rightly understood as a metaphorical strategy.

Metaphor and analogy are not the same thing, but they share common features; each is a literary device that functions through correspondence. Metaphor embodies both is-ness and is-not-ness: that is, it both corresponds and does not correspond. Analogy invites us to see connections and even evaluative perspectives through an awareness or intuition of correspondences. Certainly there is a commonality between standard definitions of metaphor and analogy:<sup>468</sup>

<sup>466</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering Of God* *op. cit.* 11.

<sup>467</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 51.

<sup>468</sup> E.g. G B Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) 152, emphasises the significance of metaphor by using the analogy of a lens. For George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University Press, 1980), "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." 19. See also



each expresses and therefore communicates something about the unknown in terms of the known. For example, compare Young's "...all language about God is analogical: it is the expression of the unknown and inexpressible in terms of the known"<sup>469</sup> with McFague's "[M]odels, as is true of metaphors...give us a way of thinking about the unknown in terms of the known."<sup>470</sup> All language about God is richly symbolic and imagistic, but symbols, *per se*, do not depend on similarity, and therefore analogy is more helpful and appropriate in discussion of the illumination of Being to which similarity of relation gives rise. As Macquarrie demonstrates helpfully:

It is clear that what we call "similarity of relation" is an analogy of proportionality, and so an analogy in the original sense. Of the four terms of the proportion, three denote beings, while the fourth term is Being. A good example comes from the Psalms: 'As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.' Here the image of the father is applied to God, on the ground that those who 'fear' him stand in a relation to him that is similar to the relation of the child to the father. Many familiar analogues are of the same kind - God as king, judge, shepherd, and so on.<sup>471</sup>

It is these 'familiar analogues' that are also known as, and referred to, as metaphors for God. In her proposal to complement 'monarchical models' of God as father, king and judge with 'less hierarchical' models that 'characterize the Christian gospel as radical, surprising love', McFague's heuristic method offers the models of mother, lover and friend. She writes:

Our experiment will suggest that these metaphors be allowed to try their chance at representing for our time the creating, saving and sustaining activities of God in relation to the world and that, together, the three metaphors of God as parent, love, and friend form a 'trinity' expressing God's impartial, reuniting, and reciprocal love to the world. In other words, we will advance the claim that the picture of God as a parent of the world represents God as a creator intimately and impartially concerned with life in all its manifestations and levels.<sup>472</sup>

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discussions of metaphor in Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.*, Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.), and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, *op. cit.*

<sup>469</sup>Frances Young, 'A Cloud of Witnesses', in John Hick, (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* *op. cit.* 34.

<sup>470</sup>Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, *op. cit.* 23

<sup>471</sup>John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* *op. cit.* 140. The Psalm cited is 103.13.

<sup>472</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (London: SCM, 1987) 91. McFague's linguistic proposals here are a reiteration and a development of her earlier



Analogy can be rightly understood as a metaphorical strategy, and so it is reasonable to construe the 'suffering God' in Moltmann as an atonement metaphor. This functions as an underlying, working atonement metaphor in The Crucified God, and reiterated, I suggest, in a range of ways as a particular methodological development of analogous correspondence.

To sum up my analysis of the logic of Moltmann's account of atonement from The Crucified God: with a firm rejection of the metaphor of sacrifice which is deemed retrospective in character, Moltmann offers an account framed in the atonement metaphor of justice, with a motif of victory, and discussed in terms of representation and substitution, with a penal stress on the latter. Underlying is, I propose, the construal of a suffering God which functions as an atonement metaphor.

The question is now, can his understanding of atonement account for all nature? How does Moltmann negotiate his account of atonement in his later, specifically ecologically oriented work? The Crucified God is not ecological theology; as Moltmann's seminal statement of his doctrine of God, it has been used here to elicit a paradigm, a basis from which to discern what kinds of moves he makes when focusing on ecological concerns.

First of all it should be said that, contrary to various claims,<sup>473</sup> it is not true that Moltmann's turn to ecological matters was an entirely new departure for him in the sense of a completely new interest. Bauckham expresses it accurately, as so often he does, observing that Moltmann has in The Way of Jesus Christ created "an impressive new synthesis," while at the same time restating "central Christological insights of ...earlier work".<sup>474</sup> But French finds that God in Creation, read against Moltmann's earlier works, "displays a grand reversal of theological direction and sensibility, a seismic shift (of) ...focus ..."<sup>475</sup>

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Metaphorical Theology *op. cit.* She develops these further in The Body of God: An Ecological Theology (London: SCM, 1993), in which she proposes the metaphor of the world as God's body.

<sup>473</sup> In particular, William French, "Returning to Creation: Moltmann's Eschatology Naturalised," Journal of Religion 68 (1988): 78-86, *et al.* Against this, others are more persuasive: for example, see Don Schweitzer, The consistency of Jürgen Moltmann's theology, "Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 22/2" (1993); Celia Deane-Drummond, Towards a Green Theology, (University of Manchester: PhD dissertation, 1993); also Robert Cornelison traces a consistent thread of major themes in "The Reality of Hope," Asbury Theological Journal 48.1 (1993): 109-20.

<sup>474</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Moltmann's Messianic Christology," *op. cit.*, 519-531.

<sup>475</sup> William French, "Returning to Creation : Moltmann's Eschatology Naturalised," *op. cit.*



French's language is misleading here due mainly perhaps to hyperbole. In fact, French does see 'deep continuities' as well as a 'great sea-change'. The point he seems to want to make is that Moltmann does not acknowledge that the kind of theology he deplores now, (and rightly so, says French), is precisely the kind he used to construct. And French is quite persuasive that Moltmann has been guilty in his earlier work, of polarising history and nature, eschatology and creation, christology and cosmology: that is, French claims that Moltmann has contributed in the past to what he himself takes now to be theology that led to 'destructive distortions of our notions about God's action in the world, the status of creation and our theological picture of the human person.'

French makes this case up to a point, but he has failed to observe ecological aspects as a constant in Moltmann's earlier work, and generally he is far too strong in saying that Moltmann's earlier eschatological programme "constitutes one of the most thoroughgoing and influential attacks on creation and nature...seen in modern theology. If Moltmann is right now, he was wrong then."<sup>476</sup> Even if French were correct with this last point, surely Moltmann should only be applauded for applying some corrective reason to his own theology. In any case, a change of emphasis and even of direction, does not amount necessarily to a 'great sea change' or a 'seismic shift'. French does make a good point, however, that it should not be the case that nature and history are 'pitted against each other', for

...it is precisely by taking seriously the radical character and dynamism of modern scientific, technological, and military history that so many are driven into deep ecological concern. It is not some ahistorical romanticism that pushes nature to the forefront of theological and ethical concern today but, rather, the apocalyptic potential of demonstrable historical trends.<sup>477</sup>

Schweitzer<sup>478</sup> is more persuasive that there are certain themes consistently present throughout Moltmann's writing. Schweitzer has developed M. Douglas Meeks' claim that Moltmann's approach is the "constant attempt to make the

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<sup>476</sup> *ibid.* Arne Rasmussen, *Church as Polis op. cit.* 114, also sees these 'ambiguities' in the earlier and later Moltmann, but adopts a rather less condemnatory tone in his discussion than does French.

<sup>477</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>478</sup> Don Schweitzer, "The consistency of Jürgen Moltmann's theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 22/2 (1993): 197-208.



eschatological revelation of God concrete in relationship to the present."<sup>479</sup> Meeks argued this in 1974 and Schweitzer has tested his claim's continued application using Theology of Hope, The Crucified God and God in Creation specifically as representative texts, but also he includes The Way of Jesus Christ in his overall conclusions. Essentially he is saying that it is not so much that Moltmann's theology has consistency despite its contextual nature, but rather *because* of it. He uses Moltmann's methodological claim that every "theology has to enter into the changing conditions of the culture in which it is pursued, perceiving and developing its own concern in these conditions"<sup>480</sup> as the maxim that can be followed throughout Moltmann's approach to constructive theology.

Schweitzer argues that Moltmann maintains this maxim through modelling his approach on the dialectical pattern of development that he sees as inherent to the biblical traditions: revelation is structured so as to link past, present and future, for the future that was promised in the past is to be arrived at through the present. A dialectical tension is created by new events which contradict previous understandings of the basic promises, for new events show previous understandings to be inadequate in expressing the truth of these basic promises relative to the present. Moltmann finds a repeated pattern in the development of Hebrew Bible traditions, which Schweitzer describes thus:

It is the fundamental attributes of God's transcendence and faithfulness revealed in the basic promises that determine the way in which this tension should be resolved. These fundamental attributes demand that traditional understandings of God be reformulated so as to relate to new experiences, while still expressing the same kind of hope as originated from the tradition's basic experiences.<sup>481</sup>

Methodologically, for Schweitzer, Moltmann reflects the kind of critical engagement with culture that he has observed in the way that biblical traditions are formed, and Schweitzer considers that this appropriation gives Moltmann's theology both 'a concrete epistemology', and also gives his thought realism related to contemporary culture. As he says, all this "indicates that Moltmann's theology

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<sup>479</sup> M. Douglas Meeks, Origins of the Theology of Hope (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 88.

<sup>480</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.*, 64. Schweitzer notes also that Moltmann has made similar statements in many of his published writings, including, *inter alia*, Theology of Hope *op. cit.* 182, and The Future of Creation, *op. cit.* 35.

<sup>481</sup> Don Schweitzer, "The consistency of Jürgen Moltmann's Theology," *op. cit.*



exhibits a definite orientation towards realism in thought....The result is a certain consistency of thought, a theoretical style that can be described as messianic realism."<sup>482</sup> Schweitzer describes it thus because, along with Moltmann's 'emphasis on realism', he insists also that doctrines must be expressive of 'normative truths' of the biblical traditions and the focus of these is the affirmation of the crucified and risen Jesus the Messiah.

Furthermore, and importantly, Deane-Drummond<sup>483</sup> finds specifically that Moltmann's earlier work incorporates creation themes and ecological motifs. She is interested also to what extent his themes of ecology and creation affect his insistence on eschatology as the context in which theology should take place. She finds that Moltmann's earlier work embodied the ecological themes of indwelling and inter-relationality and these were brought together in Moltmann's trinitarian theology, which itself functioned as a preliminary discussion to the concepts in God in Creation. She observes that Moltmann maintains consistently an eschatological orientation in his discussion of creation themes, rejecting both the notion of monarchical lordship over creation presupposed by traditional reformed theology, and the cosmological construal of the world intrinsic to natural theology.

In Moltmann, the liberation wrought by the Christ-event begins the process whereby broken relationships between God and humans, nature and humankind and within humanity might be healed. Moltmann stresses clearly the importance of future orientation in the sense of hope as the means to resist any temptation to retreat into other-worldly mysticism or apathy. Moltmann seeks an understanding of the liberating efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection: his suffering discloses God's intimate involvement in the groaning of the created order, and his pain and forsakenness bring him into relational solidarity with all the oppressed.

But the question is, how is this healing of broken relationships, this reconciliation and redemption of all God's created things expressed in terms of the logic of atonement? As The Crucified God, so also The Way of Jesus Christ and God in Creation do not specifically discuss in these theoretical soteriological terms. However, Moltmann's ecological Christology is introduced in his earlier work, and included within his discussion of human salvation:

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<sup>482</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>483</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, Towards a Green Theology, *op. cit.* 100



To the degree that the transition from an orientation on economic and ecological values and from an increase in the quantity of life to an appreciation of the quality of life, and thus from the possession of nature to the joy of existing in it can overcome the ecological crisis, *peace with nature is the symbol of the liberation of man from this vicious circle.*<sup>484</sup>

This is clearly anthropocentrically oriented, though relieved by Moltmann's further claim that nature "is not an object but man's environment, and in this has its own rights and *equilibria*."<sup>485</sup> But while atonement is indeed being discussed here in distinctly anthropocentric terms, it is interesting to note that in a piece of work more or less contemporaneous with The Crucified God, Moltmann specifically engages with ecological matters, and seems considerably less anthropocentric:

If we want to interpret salvation in Christ more theoretically, then we may look upon it as the ... universal opening up of alienated man and this alienated world towards the fullness of the divine life. God's openness for the world is revealed in the suffering and death of Christ.... The liberation achieved through the passion and glorification of Christ is made operative through the charismatic restoration of life to the world.<sup>486</sup>

This particular piece, clearly neglected by French, is couched in the language of openness of systems and God's indwelling in creation. These are picked up again by Moltmann in his later work, in which he develops notions of God's salvific action not just as atoning and reconciling, but also as *glorifying*, as a renewal of all things: that is, justification contextualised within God's righteousness and atonement of the person as part of the reconciled world. " It is ... the case that human history is consummated in the 'resurrection of nature', because only in and through that is a 'deliverance' of human life conceivable."<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God *op. cit.* 334

<sup>485</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Jürgen Moltmann "Creation and Redemption," Creation, Christ and Culture, ed. R McKinney, (Edinburgh:T&T Clark, 1976) 128. Of course, reference to 'man's environment' would offend deep ecologists, feminists and indeed all those now more aware of what is implicit in the very word 'environment' and of the importance of inclusive language. In fairness to Moltmann, though, he has moved from exclusive to inclusive language in more recent years; his reconstructive theology has reconstructed him, perhaps with advice from Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.

<sup>487</sup> Jürgen Moltmann The Way of Jesus Christ *op. cit.* 254.



It seems likely that, as Deane-Drummond found in her inquiry, Moltmann's ecological themes are present, and to a degree arguably rooted in his earlier studies. Hence, there are ecological motifs to be found in The Crucified God and in some of his other contemporaneous work, and there are clear ecological themes introduced in The Future of Creation which are then later developed.

But certainly his later work does show a range of strategic moves which set a particular agenda to try to embrace all of non-human nature alongside humanity in a soteriological scheme. First of all, he foregrounds the issue through specific emphases: God in Creation is an ecological doctrine of God, while The Way of Jesus Christ is an ecological christology. The ecological interest is stated upfront from the outset. He stresses urgency and a sense of crisis: Moltmann discusses the context for his work in terms of the consequences of the destruction of the living and life-giving Earth-system. "This is not the particular context of certain self-interests, but the global context of life. If there is not a living and life-giving Earth-system anymore, there will be no humankind either, and where there is no humankind anymore there is no Christ, no 'God incarnate' either."<sup>488</sup>

This is Moltmann, always ecclesiologicaly oriented, pointing here toward the need for right praxis: it is a matter of Christian discipleship, taking on the right attitude to the situation as he sees it. The influence of Bonhoeffer is clear in terms of trinitarian hermeneutics of God's relation to the world, the nature of the world and Christian responsibility. God's own life is thus not only affecting the world but is also affected by the world and his experiences comprise effectively his history as a community which includes the world within the loving relationships between Divine persons. As Bauckham discusses, these trinitarian ideas are dominant within Moltmann's later work, "in which the mutual relationships of the three Persons as a perichoretic, social Trinity are the context for understanding the reciprocal relationships of God and the world."<sup>489</sup>

Secondly, Moltmann tries to construe an idea of an atoned and reconciled community based on law by conferring value on nature and dignity and rights on animals. Moltmann writes with some passion:

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<sup>488</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'Christ in Cosmic Context,' *op. cit.* 180.

<sup>489</sup> Richard Bauckham The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, *op. cit.* 6



A recognition of this dignity (of all God's creatures) leads to the perception of the *rights* of every individual creature in the all-comprehensive community of creation, a community based on law....Unless the community of creation is codified as a community based on law in the covenant of God's creation, and unless this is enforced, all ecological endeavours will be nothing more than poetry and ideology.<sup>490</sup>

Moltmann's passion is more persuasive than the integrity of his argument. Quite rightly he understands that law is the base of justice and righteousness, and he grounds this in Hebrew Bible prescriptions and land theology. But more generally his account of rights is derived from, and is a development of, the notion of human rights that has been always central to his theology, and it is this that gives rise to a difficulty. For although his account of rights is theologically based, Moltmann makes all forms of particular ethics subordinate to universal rights ethics, and for him, to reject this would make Christians (or any group) 'enemies of the human race'.<sup>491</sup>

For Moltmann, rights language helps the church render its proposals universally intelligible morally and politically; as such, it is helpful for people from different traditions and cultures in their co-operative work for peace, justice and nature. Historically, rights develop conditioned by culture and particularity, but once articulated and clarified they become self-evident and tradition-independent. Thus rights language, as the universal and basic moral language, takes priority over all individual traditions (*including* the Christian tradition). These particular traditions may contribute in a creative way to developments of the vocabulary of rights, but they may never contradict it.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 307-8.

<sup>491</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'Human Rights, the Rights of Humanity and the Rights of Nature,' *Concilium*, 2 (1990), 120-135.

<sup>492</sup> See the discussions in Stanley Rudman, *Concepts of person and Christian Ethics*, *op. cit.* 310ff., and in Arne Rasmussen, *Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1995) 114ff. Despite his biblical basis, Moltmann seems to make 'rights' a legal fiction. Rights claims for animals are, in any case, difficult to ground, and ethical discussion about non-human animals can be arguably more persuasive if it moves towards the notion of animal welfare and human responsibilities *towards* animals as moral norms. There is a considerable quantity of literature in the area of animal rights, with many and various accounts arguing a case for animal rights. Although hardly a new topic as such, there has been a proliferation of discussion over the last 35 years, a development analogous in temporal terms to endeavours in ecological theology. The first modern challenge to traditional moral views of animals came from a collection of philosophical papers edited by three graduate students from Oxford: Stanley Godlovitch and John and Rosalind Harris, *Animals, Men and Morals: an enquiry into the maltreatment of the non-human* (Gollancz, 1971). Other notable examples include Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM, 1994), in which Linzey argues for a Christian basis for what he calls the 'theos-rights' of animals that is consistent with the notions of reverence and responsibility that Christian tradition has - as he observes, in its better moments - embraced. The basis of these rights is that creation exists for the Creator, and since



Somewhat ironically, this is Moltmann, himself a critic of the Enlightenment heritage where he sees it has handed down an attitude of exploitation of nature, surely now acquiescing in its very tradition.<sup>493</sup> Effectively he is saying that Christian ethics can be held only inasmuch as they do not conflict with the universal truth of modernity, and that Christian truth has to be defended at the bar of modern reason. Furthermore there is a difficulty in claiming the logical and moral priority of the universality of truth on the one hand, while on the other arguing that the survival of humankind depends on the rights of both humanity and nature, rights that he wishes to ground in covenant law.

Thirdly, in perhaps his most interesting and theologically satisfying part of the ecological agenda he is setting for himself, Moltmann seems to be working out what he calls 'the supreme analogy in creation', that is, an *analogia relationis*. In his discussion of the Genesis narratives he is careful to acknowledge the distinction made between God's 'creating' (*bara'*) and his 'making' (*'asah*), and between the concept of his creating and his separating. In Genesis 1.1 *bara' elohim* (God created) indicates creation as a whole, absolutely new, *ex nihilo*; it is not present nor inherent, either actually or potentially, in anything else. *Bara'* is not used in any instance in conjunction with the accusative of a material from which any entity is to be made. This latter form of 'making', that is, the purposeful manufacture of specific things or works out of matter that already exists, that is, the 'making' of Gen 1.2ff, uses the verb *'asah* (made). "(In) 'making' ... something

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"God's nature is love, and since God loves creation, it follows that what is genuinely given and purposed by that love must acquire some right in relation to the Creator" 24. Linzey's original attempt at grounding rights for animals, back in 1976, was on the basis of the criterion of sentience, which he considered was a way of making sense of the value of created beings, the scriptural sense of human responsibility towards animals and the fact that animals could be harmed in ways that plants and rocks could not. *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment* (London: SCM, 1976). His argument here was not well received in philosophical quarters generally, but more appreciated by Tom Regan, an articulate spokesperson for the Animal Rights movement; see his *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1984.) Stephen Clark offers a Christian realist account: *Animals and their Moral Standing* (London: Routledge, 1997). Clark is a determined anti-utilitarian. Peter Singer, a convinced utilitarian, argues a rights case on that basis, and introduces the category 'speciesism' which he sees as analogous to racism and sexism; see, *inter alia*, *Practical Ethics* 2nd Edition, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995.) In general, secular animals rights discourses argue from particular principles of non-human personhood or analogues of status.

<sup>493</sup>Perhaps Moltmann can be understood at times as giving out mixed messages. Ellen Charry finds that Moltmann accepts the modern understanding of the self, in contradistinction to a Christian construal, because it is free from any oppressive and repressive elements that have characterised past Christian tradition. 'The Crisis of Modernity and the Christian Self', in J Moltmann, N Wolterstorff and E T Charry, *A Passion for God's Reign: Theology, Christian Learning, and the Christian Self*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). However, in *The Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.* ch 5., discussing freedom, Moltmann rejects any easy and unhelpful polarity of false alternatives of either God or freedom. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society* *op. cit.* See also the helpful, extended discussion in Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, (London: WJK, 2002) ch 8.



is given its particular character and aptitude. The divine making of the 'works' of creation finds its analogy in the work of human beings. The reason given for the sabbath commandment is that God *made* heaven and earth in six days (Ex.20.11; 31.17), not that he created them. For only his 'making' can be a model for this human work, since it is forming and producing."<sup>494</sup> Moltmann affirms the priestly, mediatorial function of human beings in their relations with God and with the whole of creation, but this mediation is modelled on the analogy of 'making'. God's creative activity has no analogy: the divine creativity and human activity are not comparable.

Thus while humans are in the image of God, this is not so in the same way for the rest of creation. But instead nature *images* God in that it mirrors his work. Moltmann is somehow constructing sets of relationships which, on the one hand, form part of his on-going re-statement of trinitarian construals. Certainly it seems Moltmann is attempting to establish a web of relationships through analogous correspondence. In discussing creation, he writes

What distinguishes human beings is that they are ordained to be the image of God...what (this) means for God is that in creation he does not merely want to recognise his work; he also wants in his work to recognise himself. The creation of God's image on earth means that in his work God finds...the mirror in which he recognises his own countenance...As God's *work*, creation is not essentially similar to the Creator; it is the expression of his will. But as *image*, men and women correspond to the Creator in their very essence, because in these created beings God corresponds to himself...As the image of God on earth, human beings correspond first of all to the relationship of God to themselves and to the whole of creation. But they also correspond to the inner relationships of God himself - to the eternal, inner love of God which expresses and manifests itself in creation.<sup>495</sup>

On the other hand, this seems also to be some kind of departure - though I stress only in terms of emphasis - from the priority of contradiction over correspondence that he holds in The Crucified God. There, Moltmann affirms the 'analogical principle of knowledge' but considers it 'one-sided if it is not supplemented by the dialectical principle of knowledge.' Indeed the latter is prior: "(T)hus the theology

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<sup>494</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation, *op. cit.*73. The use of Exodus 20.11 underscores the linguistic point: here The Lord made (*'asah*) heaven and earth (and the sea, and all that is in them), while in Gen 1.1 God created (*bara'*) the heavens and the earth.

<sup>495</sup> *ibid.* 77.



of the cross must begin with contradiction and cannot be built upon premature correspondences."<sup>496</sup> As one way of doing this, he uses Golgotha as a symbol of 'otherness': placing Christ in this godless 'otherness' puts him on the side of the godless that they may 'know' him and be justified. Resonant of Bonhoeffer's "God lets himself be pushed out of the world and onto the cross... (T)hat is a reversal of what the religious man expects from God,"<sup>497</sup> Moltmann draws the analogy, enabled by the notion of revelation in contradiction, of "...it is the godless, forced out by the church, who recognise the inner distinction between the reality of the cross on Golgotha and its cultic representation within the church."<sup>498</sup>

Knowledge of God comes thus from knowledge of the cross, and hence the logical priority here of contradiction. He is also affirming moral priority in saying the "transcendence of the crucified Christ is not metaphysical, but the transcendence of concrete rejection."<sup>499</sup> Thus, in The Crucified God, Moltmann is clearly stressing that knowledge of God is apprehended in contradiction; in other words, God reveals Godself in what God is not, in God's opposite.

In The Future of Creation, he is still stressing epistemological necessity: "...the Pauline doctrine of justification emerges as being *knowledge about God*"<sup>500</sup> (Moltmann's italics). But he is also emphasising the complementarity of the dialectical principle of revelation in the opposite, bringing knowledge of the unlike, with the analogical principle of knowledge of what is similar. "(K)nowing begins with contradiction and ends with correspondence. It begins with pain and ends with joy."<sup>501</sup> Underlying this is Moltmann's construal of a suffering God 'functioning', I suggest, as an atonement metaphor. To quote Bauckham again on Moltmann's passible God: "[T]he 'passibility' of God, in the sense that God can be affected by God's creatures, means not only that God suffers with and for them but also that their salvation from evil, suffering and death brings God joy."<sup>502</sup> Moltmann is making a subtle shift here towards foregrounding relationships of analogous correspondence, for example, relationships between God, humans and nature in God in Creation, as above. And he introduces this move in The Future of Creation, for example, "(I)n the justification of the godless and in faith we see

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<sup>496</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 27-8.

<sup>497</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.* 360.

<sup>498</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, *op. cit.* 45.

<sup>499</sup> *ibid.* 98.

<sup>500</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Future of Creation *op. cit.* 78.

<sup>501</sup> *ibid.* 79.

<sup>502</sup> Richard Bauckham, preface in Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, 2nd edition, *op. cit.* xii.



the beginning of the transformation and the creation of the whole for the glorification of God."<sup>503</sup>

But this move is a change of emphasis, as stated, a subtle shift. In his ecological theology, he maintains the idea of revelation in contradiction imparting knowledge about God precisely through the disclosive nature of social and cultural dysfunctionalities: society's 'fundamental contradictions' as he expresses it. And surely he makes this shift precisely because of the particular difficulties inherent in trying to embrace all created things within a soteriological scheme. Linguistic moves are necessary. For one of the major problems that Moltmann has to negotiate when it comes to foregrounding the issue of God's atoning action in relation to that which is not personal, to that which is not indeed *rational*, is that his account is one based almost exclusively in the metaphor of justice, and he has been determined to discuss justification precisely as *knowledge* about God.

In prioritising contradiction over correspondence he stresses dialectical knowledge of God - knowledge that can be apprehended *only* in contradiction - as the "basis and starting point of analogy".<sup>504</sup> This highlights the need for him to modify his language and move toward the notion of glorification and away from an emphasis on justification with the logical difficulties that arise from its epistemological base. It also raises a question about a theological premiss of epistemological necessity that links salvation to particular knowledge.<sup>505</sup>

It seems likely that Moltmann recognises this difficulty as he cites ways that lead "from the knowledge of personal reconciliation with God in faith to the perception of the reconciliation of the world",<sup>506</sup> thus introducing a distinctly weaker cognitive relation. Here he has found a way of construing particular, personal experience as a form of knowing that might be understood as an

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<sup>503</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, *op. cit.* 171.

<sup>504</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 28.

<sup>505</sup> In his *Atonement and Incarnation* *op. cit.* Vernon White argues persuasively for ontological necessity, but that also a theology of epistemological necessity be jettisoned in order to be true to the traditional Christian claim to universality. He is, however, only addressing the human world in his substantive discussion. The salvific efficacy of the cross in the embrace of all of God's creation is not anyway a new idea. See John Macquarrie's discussion of the work of Christ in *Principles of Christian Theology*, *op. cit.* Here he writes, "(W)e have said that reconciliation aims at the human race as a whole...This may not mean that all men must explicitly accept the particular symbols of the Christian revelation...Without in any way taking away from the historical and eschatological work of Christ, we can recognise its continuity and kinship with that universal reconciling work of God in all creation, a work that has as its goal the gathering of all creaturely beings into a commonwealth of love...the universal reconciling work of God, a work that is inseparable from his creating on the one hand, and from his consummating on the other." 326-7.

<sup>506</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 283.



eschatological moment in time. He attempts to negotiate this move by invoking categories of bodiliness and analogy: employing the mediating modes of the assumption of all nature and incorporation, he writes it is logical that "God would not be the creator of all things if he did not desire the redemption of them all... [I]t is the 'bodily fullness of the Godhead' (Col.2.9) which burst all the barriers and must lay hold of all things and redeem them."<sup>507</sup> And, invoking identification, he asserts that the "connecting link between the redemption personally experienced in faith and the redemption of the whole creation is the *embodiment* of human beings. Together with the whole sighing creation, we wait 'for the redemption of our bodies' (Rom.8.23)."<sup>508</sup> Human and non-human bodies, therefore, are indivisibly bound up by living together with and in nature. The question is now, how can Moltmann express this human bodily redemption in ways that will embrace and relate to all nature?

Moltmann's statement of a God of suffering love holds the key here. The crucified God enables him to maintain the centrality of the personal action of God in Christ, and he describes this in the personal language of suffering. That is, 'suffering' enables Moltmann implicitly to insist that the atoning action of God is personal, through Christ's work on the cross. The suffering of Christ provides the personal language which entails that the logic of atonement is expressed and grounded in a particular person. That particular person - Jesus - is, in himself, *the* action of the atoning God; importantly, he is not merely an exemplar of that atoning action.

Somehow Moltmann has then to link the suffering of God with the suffering not only of humanity but also of all creation. Both moves are problematic: he holds a strongly objective account of atonement holding onto the centrality of God's action in the person of Christ, and this he expresses in the language of suffering. But a difficulty arises with the language of personal suffering of Christ in relation to human personal suffering, and arises more acutely when he wishes further to relate it to impersonal nature. In each case, the language of analogous correspondence is required. The use of 'suffering' as an atonement metaphor is precisely the way that Moltmann negotiates this particular difficulty, for it enables him to maintain this use of personal language and categories in drawing impersonal nature into a soteriological scheme. He reiterates it through categories of analogy: in God in Creation, the suffering God is stated in terms of the

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<sup>507</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>508</sup> *ibid.*



suffering cosmic Spirit; and in The Way of Jesus Christ as the suffering cosmic Christ.

Moltmann's intention in God in Creation is to present a doctrine of creation that is "'Christian' in its original sense, as 'messianic'... (understood) as the word has been moulded by Jesus' proclamation and his history...(hence) a view of the world in the light of Jesus the Messiah."<sup>509</sup> It is to be 'trinitarian' and 'ecological'. In his preface he explains, "(B)y the title 'God in Creation' I mean God the Holy Spirit. God is the 'lover of life' and his Spirit is *in* all created beings."<sup>510</sup> Moltmann's conception of God in creation is firmly pneumatological; this is a theological requirement, biblically based and rooted in covenant ideas:

...without a pneumatological doctrine of creation there cannot be a Christian doctrine of creation at all...without a perception of the Creator Spirit in the world there cannot be a peaceful community of creation in which human beings and nature share....it is intended to point out that the divine Spirit (*ruach*) is the creative power and the presence of God in his creation.<sup>511</sup>

Creation is primarily a pneumatological doctrine held in tension christologically. Thus the Father creates through the Son in the Holy Spirit: creation is in the Spirit, that is, the spirit of the universe which is its totality. God is present in the world through the Spirit, but also that the world is present in God. Moltmann uses the trinitarian notion of *emperichoresis*, the interpenetration of the three Persons within the Godhead into one another, to affirm the theorem that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect this prior trinitarian interpenetration, so that there is no such entity as solitary, unitary existence. He develops the theme of redemption of all creation through his use of God's suffering as an atonement metaphor. He writes here:

the Spirit of God himself represents believers and creation in their sighs for liberty through his sighs too deep for words (Rom.8.26). The dumb sighs of nature and the uttered cry of human beings for liberty are gathered up by the Spirit into his own sighing. In the bondage of creation, in

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<sup>509</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation *op. cit.* 4-5.

<sup>510</sup> *ibid.* xii.

<sup>511</sup> *ibid.* 99.



the pains of the body and in the yearning of believers, the Spirit is co-imprisoned and co-suffering.<sup>512</sup>

Moltmann's stress on pneumatology is clear; it is the cosmic Spirit who suffers with the creation, while this suffering is related to the love of the creator for the creation. In terms of the language of atonement logic, it is mediated by assumption and expressed as representative. The cosmic Spirit acts in nature creating new possibilities of healed relationships, and so is open to all systems of matter and life. The Spirit moves the history of creation from a history of suffering to one of hope. Along with the concept of the cosmic Spirit, Moltmann's understanding of Christ as the 'ground of salvation' for the whole creation entails also that he is the "ground for the existence of the whole creation, human beings and nature alike."<sup>513</sup> This theme of Christ's universal lordship derives from Israel's construal of God's eternal Wisdom: hence in God in Creation there is an incipient *Sophia* Christology which is developed further in The Way of Jesus Christ. God's Wisdom and God's Logos are personified in Jesus: "(S)pirit Christology is also Wisdom Christology...(and) they express the messianic secret in different ways."<sup>514</sup>

In The Way of Jesus Christ the key christological features are his recurrent themes of eschatology and relationality. Jesus is 'on the way' to his messianic future, and is defined by his relationships: with the Father and the Spirit in the Trinity, with other persons in his social relationships, and with the non-human creation. Moltmann is attempting a new christological paradigm, demanded, as he sees it, by socio-political and cultural developments and their implications for the soteriological significance of Christianity.

This contemporary context Moltmann reads as the burgeoning social inequalities between North and South of the globe, the nuclear danger and the threat to the whole environment rendered by the ecological crisis. Moltmann is here reiterating and reintroducing themes established in previous work: the political ethics of Theology of Hope and The Crucified God, and the ecological ethic of his eschatological reconstruction of creation in The Future of Creation and God in Creation.

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<sup>512</sup> *ibid.* 69.

<sup>513</sup> *ibid.* 94.

<sup>514</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 74.



Moltmann restates in The Way of Jesus Christ his concept of a suffering God. Again he uses similar language to discuss the event of the cross as in The Crucified God: the language of abandonment and surrender in the context of the contradiction of unity in separation and separation in unity, which itself is construed as suffering love and identification as at-one-ment. "On the cross the Father and the Son are so widely separated that the direct relationship between them breaks off ... And yet on the cross the Father and the Son are so much at one that they present a single surrendering movement."<sup>515</sup>

In The Crucified God, the suffering love of God for his creation drew out the role of the Father as subject; in The Way of Jesus Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ mark the beginning of the Spirit as subject of the glorification of the cosmos. Moltmann is discussing this pneumatologically, including and synthesising the concept of the cosmic Spirit with the cosmic Christ: these have complementary roles in redemption and glorification. The Spirit's role in glorification becomes possible only in solidarity with Christ and in the context of the participation of all creation in Christ's death and resurrection. The surrender of the Father and the Son is made through the Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the bond in the division, forging the link between the originally lived unity, and the division between the Father and the Son experienced on the cross...the Spirit who was Jesus' active power now becomes his suffering power...The sufferings of Christ are also the sufferings of the Spirit. The Spirit is the divine subject of Jesus' life-history; and the Spirit is the divine subject of Jesus' passion history. This means we must even add that Jesus suffered death in 'the power of Indestructible life' (Heb. 7.16), and through this power 'of the eternal Spirit' (9.14) in his death destroyed death. Consequently, through the slain Christ, indestructible life is opened up to all the dying.<sup>516</sup>

In The Way of Jesus Christ Moltmann is working with the theme of the cosmic Christ *mediating* between God and the world: Christ as the ground of salvation. This theme reflects Israel's understanding of God's eternal wisdom; God's wisdom and *Logos* are here personified in Christ. Thus Moltmann grounds Logos christology in wisdom christology:

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<sup>515</sup> *ibid.* 174.

<sup>516</sup> *ibid.*



The Christ who annihilates death in his resurrection from the dead reveals himself in the dimensions of this creation Wisdom, and was already understood in this sense very early on...The Wisdom of creation is pre-existent in all things, because all things are created through her. She is the inexhaustible creative ground of cosmic history. But she is not merely creation's mediatrix. She is also its sustainer. All things exist not merely *through* Wisdom but *in* her. God creates the world and makes it fast ... This making fast of heaven and earth can be understood as God's covenant with his creation. Wisdom gives all things their cohesion and the harmony which lends them their abiding quality...In this conceptual world, Wisdom is the secret bond of creation. She suffers the enmity of created things, their lack of order and their mortality ... Logos christology is originally Wisdom christology, and is as such cosmic christology. The *ontological foundation* for cosmic christology is Christ's death. In the light of the cosmic dimensions of his resurrection, his death on the cross takes on universal significance.<sup>517</sup>

In this ecological context what is happening to Moltmann's soteriology? As discussed, Moltmann's early work contained ecological motifs, and these have developed into the main focus in his later doctrines of God and of christology. He has made various moves in setting an agenda, including shifts of emphases and in use of language. But what has happened to his account of atonement in terms of its logic?

Moltmann unites all living things through the point that if breath is the criterion of life, then the whole living body is the locale of life.<sup>518</sup> Invoking *ruach* in this way may owe a debt to the Buberian concept of Spirit, though Moltmann's only (relevant) reference to Buber is to quote his "[I]n the beginning was relation."<sup>519</sup> Smith's study of the concept of spirit claims two central traditions: the first is Hegelian and posits spirit in history and mind, focusing on spirit as mind. The second is from Buber and sees spirit in nature and especially in relationships, and focuses on spirit as breath of life.<sup>520</sup> It is this Buberian tradition that an ecological theology depends upon, for it not only allows continuity across all life forms, but also it affirms relationship between these diverse forms. This is the kind of claim Moltmann needs to make if he is to speak of universal suffering and redemption of all things, the glorification of all nature in the new creation.

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<sup>517</sup> *ibid.* 282.

<sup>518</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* 255

<sup>519</sup> *ibid.* 11.

<sup>520</sup> Steven Smith, *The Concept of the Spiritual* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1988).



This move is anticipated in The Future of Creation where Moltmann argues that the doctrine *ex nihilo* may not be seen simply ontologically and as a theology of creation, for what "is here called 'nothing' and 'annihilation' becomes manifest in Christ."<sup>521</sup> That is, *annihilatio* is that which descends on all beings in the end of all things, not transitoriness within the world but the passing of the world, its ultimate inability to endure. Thus the cross of Christ is meaningful for all creation, and Moltmann discusses its salvific significance in terms of an objective account, framed in the metaphor of justice and in terms of substitution and representation, here mediated by identification and incorporation. But Moltmann's discussion here weaves these more universal and ecological ideas with an account similar to his paradigm from The Crucified God.

Again Moltmann rejects the sacrificial metaphor as inadequate: he sees its function as operating strictly within the concept of expiation in the 'old covenant'. Moltmann wishes to place a stress on the 'giving up' formula in its universal context and so emphasises the need to understand it christologically. His statement shows an understanding of God's justice as wrath, which is his interpretation of Paul, and makes clear also his consistent metaphors. Moltmann says:

That is why the cross of Jesus has universal meaning for the whole wretched creation...The wrath of God and the misery of creation...hangs over everything; but it is manifest and comes into effect in the one 'who was made sin for us'. In the cross of Christ the relentless pressure of creation is...enforced on him in creation's stead. God 'gave up' his Son for those who were 'given up' to the power of their godlessness. The 'giving up' formula is universal: all men are given up to the power of sin and the wrath of God; and the formula is to be understood christologically: Christ is given up 'for all', so that we might live in him. That is why his cross can no longer be interpreted merely as a prophet's destiny, or as an expiatory offering under the old covenant....It makes him one with the sighs of the whole afflicted creation, because it makes him one with the divine complaint of the Christ dying in forsakenness.<sup>522</sup>

In The Crucified God, Moltmann discusses the cross as the beginning of the trinitarian history of the suffering of God. Prior to developing this further in God

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<sup>521</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Future of Creation, *op. cit.* 163

<sup>522</sup> *ibid.* 163-4.



in Creation, he reiterates it in The Future of Creation with a clearly eschatological thrust:

God's history is not a fact that could be recognised in detachment, as something finished and complete, once and for all. For through the Holy Spirit the history of Christ with God and the history of God with Christ becomes the history of God with us and hence our history with God...and Christ's history with God and God's history with Christ is unfinished; in the Spirit, it is open for man and thrusts forward towards salvation...If, instead of talking about the Trinity, we talk about 'the trinitarian history of God', it is because this phrase means just this moving vitality of God's, and with it the knowledge that is impelled by it and is living and life-giving.<sup>523</sup>

The cross is exactly the crucial point of contact - the mode of access - between God and human suffering in its generality and its totality. As such, it is more than a revelation of God's continuous love for his people; it constitutes God's own participation in all human suffering universally.

In God in Creation, Moltmann addresses this by narrating the suffering of God through tracing it right back to his originating act of *creatio ex nihilo*, and he discusses this in terms of resurrection and redemption. Creation and redemption are being held closely together; creation understood as God's first redemptive act. To cite Gunton, creation is a project, that is, it is made to go somewhere; and it moves towards an end that is greater than the beginning.<sup>524</sup> Thus *creation itself* promises the ultimate overcoming of death through resurrection to the victory of eternal life: "...the resurrection and the kingdom of glory are the fulfilment of the promise which creation itself represents."<sup>525</sup>

Moltmann is interpreting God's resolve to create as also his means to save; creation in the beginning is both preparatory and promissory of the 'redeeming *annihilatio nihili*'. His final interpretation of creation, from the perspective of the cross of Christ, renders an objective account of atonement that is one of substitution and representation, framed in justice, with a motif of victory, and mediated by imputation and identification; even a hint of sacrificial language creeps in:

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<sup>523</sup> *ibid.* 82.

<sup>524</sup> Colin Gunton, The Triune Creator, *op. cit.* 12.

<sup>525</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation, *op. cit.* 90.



By entering into the God-forsakenness of sin and death (which is Nothingness), God overcomes it and makes it part of his eternal life...In the light of the cross of Christ, *creatio ex nihilo* means forgiveness of sins through Christ's suffering, justification of the godless through Christ's death, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal life through the lordship of the lamb....Through his self-emptying he creates liberation, through his self-humiliation he exalts, and through his vicarious suffering the redemption of sinners is achieved.<sup>526</sup>

In creation, and in God's affirmation of it and faithfulness to it despite negligent human behaviour, and in his will to save, God sends and surrenders his own Son: "(H)is liberating and healing rule also embraces the fulfilment of the ...promise given to human beings at creation. Under the conditions of history and in the circumstances of sin and death, the sovereignty of the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus is the only true *dominium terrae*."<sup>527</sup> Again God's suffering as an atonement metaphor is clear, for in surrendering his son God becomes exposed himself to the annihilating nothingness which is sin and death. God's presence in his suffering love for his creation pervades and overcomes the experience of death in the godforsaken space, and "(T)hat is why God's presence in the crucified Christ gives creation eternal life, and does not annihilate it."<sup>528</sup>

In God in Creation, Moltmann grounds his account of atonement in a theory of justification, but makes a move towards a discussion based on glorification, and bridged by sanctification. Hence the marked eschatological thrust, for he speaks of justification as the present form, the beginning of glorification which is a future state, with sanctification as a kind of way that is the link between the two; thus this is not a static process.

Justification is therefore the beginning of glorification here and now, in the present; glorification is the future completion of justification. Both come about through God's free gracious election (Rom. 11.5) - the Creator's relation to human beings which proves itself in faithfulness. Between the experienced justification of the sinner and the hoped-for glorification of the person lies the path of sanctification...Sanctification has justification as its presupposition, and glorification as its hope and its future.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> *ibid.* 89ff.

<sup>527</sup> *ibid.* 91.

<sup>528</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> *ibid.* 227.



There is an aspect of subjective human response: "the path of sanctification has to do with 'putting on the new human being, created after the likeness of God' ... *Being* human means *becoming* human in this process,...and in this process people experience themselves as accepted, promised, wholly, bodily and socially."<sup>530</sup> A truly human life that participates in suffering leads towards a re-ordering of our inner and outer relationships, and also transforms our relationship to our future and to the transcendent. Moltmann expresses this truly human life as one that enables the healing of the dimensions of personal confidence, social life, life history and personal significance and meaning.

There is an exemplary account in God in Creation, discussed in terms of *imitatio Christi*, that is, the horizon of the future glorification of humankind is through the messianic path of *imago Christi* to become *gloria Dei* on earth. Given that God created humans as *imago Dei*, "to be his image....to represent God on earth,"<sup>531</sup> then human beings should not wish to exercise total control over their fellow creatures; humans may be specially placed within creation, but they are not to behave as the owners of nature. This is surely what Moltmann is wanting to express in the notion of an ecological doctrine in the context of the Sabbath. Creation is completed in the Sabbath and when human beings anticipate this completion by keeping the Sabbath, they will demonstrate this by non-interference in their environment: a freedom that acknowledges that creation is God's and has value as such, rather than as the plaything or tool of humankind. This concept also expresses biblical ideas from, *inter alia*, Job, and the truth of 'The Earth is the Lord's', that humans have land on loan from God and on the understanding that they treat it with respect and care.

Glorification follows from sanctification on the messianic path with Christ; and for Moltmann this future glory, based in biblical phrases from 1 John 3.2, and 1 Cor. 13.12, means the difference between a conforming to the grace of God now, and an entering of the glory of God into creation in the future. The form of this future glory is not thoroughly determined, and this idea of the human person who has her/his identity in the future is intimately connected with Moltmann's pneumatology. For Moltmann sin is fundamentally closedness to God, and thus the way to salvation for him is also the way of openness to God. A human spirit is more than reflective subjectivity, or some kind of fixed identity; rather Moltmann

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<sup>530</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>531</sup> *ibid.* 218-9



means "the anticipatory structure of his whole physical, mental and spiritual existence."<sup>532</sup>

The Way of Jesus Christ is a study of christology, not Moltmann's first, for in Theology of Hope and The Crucified God he discussed the transition from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. But now, as he puts it, he has found a further question, one "more important still, because it is more down to earth - more embodied.... Modern christology directs attention towards Christ's bodily nature and its significance for earthly nature as a whole, because embodiment is the existential point of intersection between history and nature in human beings."<sup>533</sup> Moltmann restates his concept of a passible God. Discussing this in trinitarian terms, he argues for the inadequacy of the construal of the doctrine of the two natures, which

bears the mark of incarnation christology, and does not derive from the particular history of Jesus himself...Attributes are ascribed to the divine nature of Christ which the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 'the Father of Jesus Christ', never knew. His faithfulness is transformed into a substantial immutability, his zeal, his love, his compassion - in short his 'pathos', his capacity for feeling - are supplanted by the essential apathy of the divine. The passion of his love and its capacity to suffer can no longer be stated.<sup>534</sup>

Clearly, familiar themes are present but there are different approaches from Moltmann here, for these are focused through the question of Jesus' identity. Also Moltmann claims he is exceeding his earlier work by exploring the 'apocalyptic horizon' of the passion to demonstrate that Christ's sufferings were the apocalyptic sufferings which he endured to enable a new birth of creation. Moltmann is here presenting the cosmic Christ who is the bringer of this eschatological new creation.

Thus the cosmic Christ is configured as the ground of creation, the touchstone of unity between all living things, based on divine law. Moltmann rejects body: soul dualism, arguing the affirmation of all embodiment at the Parousia via a stress on the bodily resurrection of Christ which is significant for the future of all mundane nature. Christ is thus 'on his way', that is, in his coming as *Christus redemptor* rather

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<sup>532</sup> *ibid.* 103.

<sup>533</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* xvi.

<sup>534</sup> *ibid.* 53.



than as de Chardin's *Christus evolutor*. Christ is therefore the veritable cosmic incarnation of God who will usher in the new creation, gathering all things in the kingdom.

In The Crucified God, Moltmann offered a construal of Christ as hope for the hopeless through his death on the cross. In The Way of Jesus Christ Moltmann is writing in terms of the epistemological foundation for the cosmic Christ as 'the Easter appearance of the risen One', such that creation and redemption are held together. Moltmann extends this concept to make the biological death of Christ ontologically meaningful so as to be inclusive of the whole of physical creation: Christ mediates in creation as the ground of all things, the moving power in evolution and as redeemer.<sup>535</sup> Moltmann insists that only a cosmic Christology "completes and perfects the existential and historical Christology",<sup>536</sup> and cosmic Christology 'presupposes disrupted harmony' but 'looks to reconciliation of all things through Christ.' Christ mediates both to secure creation against chaos and to renew; he 'redeems evolution', coming from ahead as the one to inaugurate the new creation.<sup>537</sup>

The essential unity that binds together all of creation is fellowship in God's 'Wisdom, Spirit or Word'; so while Christ's activity in evolution is related to continuous creation, his role in the new creation is related to his coming in glory. Thus this double movement is both inseparably related to, and also distinct from, the activity of the cosmic Spirit. He takes from the Eastern Orthodox tradition that the significance of the crucified and risen Christ is not confined to forgiveness of sin and alienation, but experienced also as the way to glorification. This influence was not present in The Crucified God. And Moltmann shows a preference for 'glorification' rather than 'fulfilment', and this fits well with his concept of the on-going process of God the Promiser promising to be continuously present. "One may with consistency agree with a characteristic statement of Moltmann such as the following - 'His future is our presence, and his presence will be our future' - only if the presence referred to in each instance is understood to be promissory."<sup>538</sup> This fits well also with his move from justification via sanctification to glorification.

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<sup>535</sup> *ibid.* 289.

<sup>536</sup> *ibid.* 256.

<sup>537</sup> *ibid.* 301.

<sup>538</sup> Christopher Morse, The Logic of Promise in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology, *op. cit.* 126.



The concept of glorification is a useful one for Moltmann's discussion of the redemption of the non-human creation, which does not itself sin, though it suffers under human sin. Glorifying is a renewal of all things: justification is contextualised within God's righteousness and atonement of the person as part of the reconciled world. Moltmann sees human history as consummated in the resurrection of nature, and this is the only conceivable means of deliverance of human life.<sup>539</sup>

Moltmann reiterates his concept of a suffering God, but some of the differences in his language are interesting. Here he responds to the question of what are the sufferings of Christ, and he sums up thus:

'The sufferings of Christ' are God's sufferings because through them God shows his solidarity with human beings and his whole creation everywhere: *God is with us*.

'The sufferings of Christ' are God's sufferings because through them God intervenes vicariously on our behalf, saving us at the point where we are unable to stand but are forced to sink into nothingness: *God is for us*.

'The sufferings of Christ' are God's sufferings, finally, because out of them the new creation of all things is born: *we come from God*.

Solidarity, vicarious power and rebirth are the divine dimensions in the sufferings of Christ. Christ is with us, Christ is for us, and in Christ we are a new creation.<sup>540</sup>

These first two responses indicate the same outworking of the atonement metaphor of suffering as in the previous discussion on this matter: the 'with us/for us' logic works in the same way in establishing access to God by God. That is, the 'suffering love of God' is both 'with us' and 'for us'. But in this case the 'us' includes 'his whole creation everywhere'.<sup>541</sup> To work through the logic: a truly suffering God is 'with us', and *in* suffering, is for us. There is both a God-ward and a whole creation-ward direction. There is genuine efficacy in that God in Godself suffers: there is a solidarity in suffering for God. And such suffering insists that God is *with us* in suffering - that is, the whole creation-wardness of God's suffering in solidarity with all God's living things; it is *for us* in the sense that the encounter of

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<sup>539</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, *op. cit.* 254

<sup>540</sup> *ibid.* 181.

<sup>541</sup> Cf. Moltmann's question, "Christian theology cannot simply ask: who is Christ *for us* today? ....This is undoubtedly the third great challenge to Christian theology: *Who is Christ for dying nature and ourselves today?* *ibid.* 66ff.



divine-human suffering in Christ gives access by God to all things, even in their suffering. God's suffering is the *for us* mode of access provided by God for humankind and God's whole creation everywhere, and is also the solidarity of God *with us*, the suffering humanity and nature.

So again for Moltmann here, suffering 'functions' as a type of underlying working atonement metaphor. But he has also modified his language and added an eschatological dimension. Moltmann is still thinking in terms of God's solidarity with God's creatures. But he has dropped any reference to substitutionary atonement, and replaced this here with vicarious intervention. Importantly, he has shifted from references to 'guilt' in favour of invoking a 'sinking into nothingness': death and sin related to the transience of things rather than moral wrongdoing. This shift towards an Eastern Church understanding of death is clearly a necessary move in order to include non-human beings who do not inhabit the moral realm. And Moltmann has brought in 'rebirth' as one of the divine dimensions in the sufferings of Christ, mediated in terms of incorporation. He also moves on to introduce an 'eschatological proviso'<sup>542</sup> of the lordship of Christ, using the symbol of Easter Saturday, to express the not-yet-redeemedness of the dead being 'in Christ' but not yet raised: on the way with and in Christ, not separated but not yet perfected.

This atonement metaphor of divine suffering is strongly objective in focus. He also shows elsewhere an account of atonement in which, consistently and importantly, stress is again on the objective; but also, consistently and importantly, his account includes a subjective aspect of human response through the liberative and transformative effects of Christ's suffering and death. Here, using the language of substitution and representation, and invoking mediation through identification, Moltmann writes: "If he suffers and dies in our place, then he takes us into his sufferings from sin and violence, and draws us onto his side...We become free of it (sin and violence) through the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, and can begin with him to live out of God's new creation."<sup>543</sup>

As always, his account remains framed in the atonement metaphor of justice, achieved vicariously in a way that leans towards representation, albeit with substitutionary language. The modes of mediation are imputation and identification. When Moltmann addresses directly the soteriological significance

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<sup>542</sup> *ibid.* 191.

<sup>543</sup> *ibid.* 209-10.



of Christ's sufferings, in order to "discover their liberating, redeeming and creative energies", he offers four specific answers. These are discussed in terms of particular texts, which are:

- i) Christ was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom 4.25)
- ii) Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom 14.9)
- iii) For Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death ... so that God may be all in all (1. Cor 15.25f, 28).
- iv) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name ... that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2.9, 11).

The first goal is justifying faith. The second goal is lordship over the dead and the living. The third goal is the conquest of death, and new creation. The fourth goal is the glorification of God through a redeemed world. The immediate goal is the justification of human beings, but the supervening goal is the justification of God, while the common goal is to be found in the reciprocal justification of God and human beings, and their shared life in justice and righteousness.<sup>544</sup>

Only justifying faith corresponds to Christ crucified 'for us' and "it is only through justifying faith that the liberating power of Christ's resurrection is experienced."<sup>545</sup> Moltmann wants to express that what happened to Christ in death and resurrection happens correspondingly in the justification of sinners. But he wants also to say that it is God's righteousness and justice - drawing perhaps again on Israelite wisdom - that underpins all atoning activity and is thus the ground of all soteriological goals. He wants now to move away from limiting, as he seems to see it, justification to reconciliation which, like sacrifice, he takes to be backward looking. But "the category of righteousness ... is both central and fundamental,"<sup>546</sup> and he sees in the Pauline letters that ideas about atonement and reconciliation tend to be integral to divine righteousness. So he finds he is able to speak in terms of God's grace thrusting forward to the revelation of his glory in which he -

creates justice for those who have never known justice. He raises up the humble and obscure....The mediators of creation - the Spirit and the Word - wait and strive in all things for the liberation of

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<sup>544</sup> *ibid.* 183.

<sup>545</sup> *ibid.* 184.

<sup>546</sup> *ibid.* 187.



them all. So 'creation in chains' is not merely in need of redemption. It is also consumed by hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.<sup>547</sup>

Quite rightly he sees justice and righteousness as productive categories to embrace the non-human into the new creation. Indeed as he says, " ... the more the ecological catastrophe... threatens to destroy all life on earth, the more relevant and existential these dimensions of 'Christ's sufferings' become for the whole creation - as well as the justice and righteousness which proceed from these sufferings."<sup>548</sup>

Moltmann also includes a more developed exemplary account, with Christ's person as exemplar, showing what our true humanity is. This is discussed in terms of three dimensions:<sup>549</sup> first, in his eschatological person we can perceive the kingdom of God in person and the beginning of the new creation, and as such, he is the bringer of hope. "In him believers recognise *the messianic human being*." Secondly, as the Christ of God we perceive his theological person. As the child of God he opens up this unique relationship with God to those who believe, and in "him believers recognise *the child-like human being*." Thirdly, the Christ of God entails a further perception of him as social person, as a comrade of the poor, friend of the forsaken and sympathiser with the sick, and in him men and women recognise "*the brotherly and sisterly human being*." Each of these dimensions is of a public, not private person, and Moltmann stresses the importance here of the exemplary aspect, because ultimately it is human behaviour that must be transformed in the present. Persons must somehow be enabled to change if the community of creation based on law in the covenant of God's creation is to be realised and actualised. As Moltmann puts it, "the rediscovery of cosmic christology will have to begin with an ecological christology if cosmic christology is to be of therapeutic relevance for the nature which is today suffering under the irrationality of human beings."<sup>550</sup>

Moltmann's account of atonement has elements both of continuity and change between his paradigm in The Crucified God and his ecologically oriented God in Creation and The Way of Jesus Christ. In terms of inherent logic, he makes no radical shifts in his account, but makes certain key modifications in his attempt to

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<sup>547</sup> *ibid.* 291.

<sup>548</sup> *ibid.* 194.

<sup>549</sup> *ibid.* 149.

<sup>550</sup> *ibid.* 195.



embrace all creation. He broadens the scope of his atonement language. To summarize, Moltmann maintains his discussion in terms of representation and substitution, but makes wider use of vicariousness. He drops references to penal categories; this is a necessary move in discussing non-human nature. Allied to this, he includes the association of death and sin with the transience of things, as well as with human sin and guilt. He broadens the scope of the modes of mediation he makes use of, and supplements identification and imputation with both incorporation and assumption. Moltmann continues resolutely to reject the sacrificial metaphor as retrospective in character, maintains a motif of victory, and works consistently with a metaphor of justice. But he employs a wider range of language that fits well with a metaphor of justice in this context. While grounding his concept in justification, he moves toward a discussion based on glorification and bridged by sanctification.

This is an appropriate way of cashing out the metaphor of justice, understood in terms of God's righteousness conceived as it should be: in creative and redemptive categories, in the justice of God as God's faithfulness to the outcome of the goodness and love which eternally God bears to his whole creation, and also in relational terms.<sup>551</sup> He continues to stress the objective nature of atonement, with a subjective aspect and now a more marked exemplary account wrought by the liberative and transformative effects of Christ's suffering and death. And he restates the concept of the suffering God in The Way of Jesus Christ such that God's whole creation is included in the remit of redemption. This construal functions, I propose, as an atonement metaphor which Moltmann reiterates through categories of analogy: the suffering cosmic Spirit and the suffering cosmic Christ. The adequacy of this account of atonement will be considered in the next and final chapter.

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<sup>551</sup> Colin Gunton, The Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 102ff.



## Chapter 5 (In)conclusion: a metaphor of sacrifice?

I am often asked about my theological method, and seldom provide an answer. At a time when so many colleagues are concerned solely with questions of method, what interests me are theological ideas, and their revision and innovation...I have first to discover everything for myself, and understand it, and make it my own....I have never done theology in the form of a defence of ancient doctrines or ecclesiastical dogmas. It has always been a journey of exploration. Consequently my way of thinking is experimental - an adventure of ideas - and my style of communication is to suggest...My own propositions are intended to be a challenge to other people to think for themselves - and of course they are a challenge to objective refutation too...I have no desire to build any...fortress for myself. My image is the Exodus of the people, and I await theological Reed Sea miracles. For me theology is not church dogmatics, and not a doctrine of faith. It is *imagination for the kingdom of God* in the world, and for the world in God's kingdom.<sup>552</sup>

As often before, Moltmann resists a direct or straight discussion about method in theology. Instead he is insisting that his theology begins with his own experiences and observations, and, fired with an insatiable sense of discovery and adventure, he brings his own Christian faith and learning to bear on his analysis of what he sees about him. And, rather modestly, he says that 'if he has a theological virtue at all, then it is one that has never hitherto been recognised as such: curiosity'. He chooses not to claim any other method in theology, or any that could be more readily named. But, of course, this is itself a form of method, given that he always works in this particular way. The discursive, rhetorical style of his books and the rationale he provides for each of them reflect his own hallmarks and pattern.

Nevertheless, this pattern is always clearly shaped by a range of methodological norms and features. He begins with the cross, always seeking to rethink the meaning of the life and work of Christ for the present times, and in the framework of a God who suffers and whose trinitarian history as the "Father who sends his Son through all the abysses and hells of god-forsakenness...has become universally present."<sup>553</sup> His theology is consistently profoundly eschatological in character, for he insists that eschatology is the ground of all theology. Underlying his enquiries and reflecting his ecclesiological concerns, there lies the influence of Bonhoefferian hermeneutics of God's relation to the world, the nature of the

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<sup>552</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, *op. cit.* xiii-iv.

<sup>553</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* *op. cit.* 82; *God in Creation*, *op. cit.* 91.



world and authentic Christian responsibility and praxis. He sets for himself a specific methodological norm: to hold in creative tension, 'text' and 'context'; that is, there must be a dialectic between scripture and our contemporary late modern cultural concerns. In the light of his own experience and testimony of faith and hope, he seeks understanding. Moltmann's theology would not be best described by definitions of theology such as Hebblethwaite's "rational thought or talk about God,"<sup>554</sup> or even Macquarrie's broader description as "the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available."<sup>555</sup> But these are too limited in their scope to adequately describe any form of modern, constructive, critical theology. And it is this form of theology that Moltmann does, more like the type defined here by Hodgson:

In the broad sense, the whole of theology is a project of interpretation - a construal of the meaning of Christian faith in light of a particular set of cultural exigencies and on the basis of a particular reading of texts and traditions. No theology can claim to escape the always incomplete task of interpretation by grasping at the anchor of an authoritative scripture or a special revelation...It requires a constant 'revisioning' of Christian faith...Revisioning is a matter of *seeing* things anew, and that involves insight, imagination, and practical engagement as well as theoretical reflection. Seeing is a gift of the Spirit, which is the light by which all things become visible.<sup>556</sup>

Although Moltmann does not refer at all to any 'account of atonement' in his work - indeed, he would probably dislike the term - he does employ a full range of atonement language, with an extensive vocabulary. And the accounts that have been discerned in The Crucified God, God in Creation and The Way of Jesus Christ are testimony to a method in place and at work. A brief reprise: his paradigm is a strongly objective account framed in the metaphor of justice, with a motif of victory. He rejects out of hand any productive use of the sacrificial category, as his understanding of sacrifice is limited to expiatory offerings which he sees as retrospective in character. It is an account of representation and substitution, expressed in penal terms, with imputation and identification as the modes of mediation; and there is an aspect of subjective human response. Importantly, he articulates a 'suffering God' as, what I have proposed to be, an

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<sup>554</sup> Brian Hebblethwaite, The Problems of Theology, (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 1.

<sup>555</sup> John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, *op. cit.* 1.

<sup>556</sup> Peter Hodgson, Winds of the Spirit, *op. cit.* 7.



underlying working atonement metaphor, via his usage of the key terms 'with us' and 'for us', which enables him to establish access to God by God.

But this account of atonement, *per se*, cannot express theoretically the redemption of nature, for, *inter alia*, the language inherent in these atonement terms is personal and reflects personal categories. So Moltmann has to make a range of manoeuvres to meet the difficulties inherent in trying to offer a soteriology that will embrace all created things. Christian theologically, an objective account is vital: to be authentically Christian, an account of atonement must place its emphasis at the objective pole, for it is here that the distinctiveness of the particularity of the Christ-event as God's act is affirmed. But the achievement of God's work on the cross through Christ must necessarily be expressed in personal language: Christ in himself is God's atoning action.

Moltmann makes a range of moves to try to overcome these difficulties, but in essence, he makes no radical shifts in his account; he maintains a similar inherent logic and structure, though the dropping of penal categories is a necessary and telling move. Otherwise, he negotiates the necessary moves via modifications and a wider and richer vocabulary of atonement theoretical terminology. This applies also to his restatement in The Way of Jesus Christ of the 'suffering God' as an atonement metaphor. This is, in itself, a development of Moltmann's own trinitarian vocabulary, which he then reiterates as a particular methodological development of analogous correspondence as 'the suffering cosmic Spirit' and 'the suffering cosmic Christ'. Brief details of these moves and modifications are summarised on the final page of the previous chapter, and so do not need to be reprised here.

Moltmann's paradigm atonement metaphor of choice and preference is justice, which is expressed in terms of justification and righteousness, and which invokes an epistemology. Penal categories and talk of forgiveness cannot apply to non-human, non-rational beings who are not in the moral realm. They cannot sin, though they can, and are, sinned against and so claims to justice can be made on their behalf. Any account of atonement must offer some articulation of the metaphor of justice. As Gunton<sup>557</sup> has shown, sin must be understood existentially and relationally; that is, the whole person in relation to God and to the rest of creation.

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<sup>557</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 186f.



In terms of his use of atonement metaphors, Moltmann is absolutely and resolutely consistent: a strong account of justice, a motif of victory and a root and branch rejection of sacrifice. And here lies the crucial weakness in his account - an overall strategy which is not merely an imbalance, but which is entirely neglectful of one important aspect. To recall briefly the theoretical models discussed in chapter two. Ford<sup>558</sup> is sympathetic to accounts that strongly prioritise a single metaphor; indeed he considers the best accounts will be a rich exploration in depth of one approach, rather than an 'even-handed overview'. But, importantly, he stresses that this weighting, as it were, must not operate in such a way as to neglect or dismiss relating the one richly explored metaphor to other valid ways. Gunton,<sup>559</sup> however, insists that any adequate understanding of atonement must be expressed through a combination of each of the three traditional metaphors rather than by emphasising a single component, and, like Ford, certainly not by ignoring any one of them. And Fiddes<sup>560</sup> makes use of the three traditional metaphors as well as the Abelardian love metaphor, for each, in their different ways, plays an important part in enabling particular responses. Sacrificial ideas are central to discussions of atonement and cannot properly be either reduced to retrospective reconciliation, or dropped altogether.

Critiqued by these methodological models, Moltmann's complete dismissal of sacrifice falls foul on structural and theoretical grounds. But it also falls foul of any adequate understanding of sacrifice *per se*. Put simply, Moltmann's view of sacrifice as merely retrospective and expiatory is wrong. It is indeed the case that the Old Testament sacrificial system was the divinely-appointed means for the removal and cancelling of the effects of sin and wrongdoing; and, just as the antecedents of christology can be found in Old Testament messianic expectations, so too can New Testament understandings of Christ's costly work on the cross be traced to this Old Testament system. As Baillie put it,

It is from the sacrificial system of Ancient Israel that we have inherited the whole terminology of atonement, expiation, propitiation, reconciliation; and it seems to me that after a long and puzzling story we find that system reaching in the Christianity of the New Testament a climax which is completely transformed into the idea of an atonement in which *God alone bears the cost*.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> David Ford, 'The Face on the Cross' *op. cit.* 219.

<sup>559</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 105.

<sup>560</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation* *op. cit.* 32f.

<sup>561</sup> D M Baillie, *God was in Christ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 175.



The clearest exposition of the idea of expiatory sacrifice is found in Hebrews (cf. 9.11-14; 7.25) and the Pauline corpus. 'Christ our passover lamb is sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5.7); 'For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin' (2 Cor. 5.21), and of course, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all' (Rom. 8.23). Texts such as these confirm Baillie's claim that in the New Testament, sacrifice is primarily the costly self-giving of a gracious God. A more recent symposium on atonement<sup>562</sup> continues this broad emphasis by starting with Old Testament concepts of sacrifice and how these are reflected in New Testament interpretations of the death of Christ. However, this newer discussion also gives a certain emphasis to the forward thrust associated with the on-going present and future effects of acts of sacrifice in the Old Testament.

For example, Goldingay<sup>563</sup> takes up the discussion of the interpretation of sacrifice in the Old Testament in terms of ways of giving a gift and ways of finding cleansing and restoration. He employs the analogy of the giving of a bunch of flowers in our culture to capture the range of resonances that may inhere in this action: "...the gift of flowers is recognized as a positive gesture in the context of a relationship. But the gesture may have various significances. It may express or accompany gratefulness for some act, appreciation for the person, hope for some favour, sorrow for some wrongdoing, or regret for some non-culpable failure..."<sup>564</sup>

In terms of gift-giving, a thank offering expresses gratitude to God for a particular divine act, while a whole offering is suggestive of the giver's complete commitment to God. Sin and guilt offerings, better rendered by Wenham<sup>565</sup> as purification and restitution offerings, provide the mode of cleansing from stain, and for making good on the consequences of failure. Thus sacrificial giving covers a whole range of evidence of a response to God: commitment, appreciation, gratitude, hope, shame and regret. And this giving of a gift actually *does* something within a relationship; it can have, as Goldingay puts it, a 'magical effect' and therefore not only maintains the relationship, but also can transform it. Within the New Testament, these concrete, material and symbolic expressions should be seen in the context of an interpersonal relationship. "To see Christ's death as a gift offered to God sets it in the context of a person-to-person

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<sup>562</sup> John Goldingay, (ed.) *Atonement Today*, *op. cit.*

<sup>563</sup> John Goldingay, 'Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ' in *Atonement Today*, *op. cit.* 3-20.

<sup>564</sup> *ibid.* 3. He might also have included regret for some culpable failure.

<sup>565</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, *op. cit.* 88-9.



relationship of mutual commitment with its potential for love, favour, generosity, self-sacrifice, gratitude, and forgiveness."<sup>566</sup>

The very structure of Israel's sacrificial system demonstrates a concern for the fact of human weakness and failure; giving expression to commitment, thankfulness and appreciation arguably implies a sharing and participation in this failure. Sin or purification offerings and guilt or restitution offerings, deal with the stain that certain acts might bring on a person or indeed a place, and also the position of indebtedness which may be the result for a person of such acts. These offerings apply irrespective of whether any moral blame attaches to a person or not, and provide the way for the cleansing of a person (or a place, in which case clearly there can be no question of culpability), and for making up for the wrong in certain respects. It is the guilt or restitution offering that is associated and identified metaphorically with the servant's death in Isaiah 53.5-6, and thus "[H]ere sacrifice is already spoken of typologically in the Old Testament."<sup>567</sup>

The person who offers a sacrifice - which, however construed or interpreted, is always a gift - is directly or indirectly personally identified with that gift. The giver lays hands on the gift and thus becomes identified with it, and this laying on of hands is indicative that the gift represents the giver because something of the giver is transferred to the gift. The gift thus also in some sense substitutes for the giver, but it is important to remember that in both representation and substitution here the giver is not merely giving a gift that is entirely his to give. The gift will be some choice offering from his property as such, but ultimately everything belongs already to God, and hence God has provided the gift to the giver to be made sacred and returned to God for, and on behalf of, the giver. In the sin or purification offering or the Day of Atonement, the stain on the giver is transferred to the gift and then removed, indeed destroyed, within the sacrificial process. It is the stain, then, not the guilt that has been passed to the gift from the giver, and therefore the gift has been vicariously cleansed rather than vicariously punished.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> John Goldingay, (ed.) *Atonement Today*, *op. cit.* 6.

<sup>567</sup> *ibid.* 8.

<sup>568</sup> Goldingay stresses that sacrifice does not involve penal substitution in the sense that the offering bears the offerer's punishment. "The idea of punishment belongs in the framework of law rather than the framework of worship, and we get into difficulties when we mix ideas from the different frameworks such as these....Misunderstanding of Isaiah 53.5-6 and 10-12 as if it implied a punitive understanding of sacrifice is one root of the idea that there is a link between atonement and punishment...Indeed, Isaiah 53 (misunderstood) and Hebrews form the restrictive prism which has dominated Christian thinking about the atonement." *ibid.* 8-10.



In an interpretation of the death of Christ as sacrificial purification ritual or in terms of the Day of Atonement practice, God allows the transfer of the stain or impurity to something, indeed someone, else: the sinless one made sin or made a sin offering. The stain or impurity is removed and destroyed, thus cleansing and making whole again. "What was polluted can be restored through contact with the clean, as is announced by Jesus' unhesitating willingness to reach out to touch the polluted. They are no danger to him; he brings cleansing and restoration to them."<sup>569</sup>

While in the context of cleansing and restoration there is a strong sense of the retrospective, it would be wrong to reduce this construal to a merely backward looking act, as Moltmann clearly does. And furthermore, the concept of cleansing, purifying and restoring 'place' as well as 'person' is clearly a relevant idea when considering the redemption of non-human created things. Cleansing and restoration must also be seen within the context of relationships, and here purification and restitution make a path for richer and deeper relationships. Again there is openness and orientation to the future, the possibility of transformation and the enabling of potential. In terms of atonement theory, sacrifice - rightly understood - is reflective of the necessary objective and subjective poles: God's own decisive act and the potential growth in holiness and in transformative effects that flow from that act.

There is, then, rather more to sacrificial practices than Moltmann allows for. He speaks only of expiatory sacrifices 'to remove the sins of the people'. Indeed these were a part of the picture, but are far from being its totality. Sacrifices were many and various in terms of individual type and function. Taken as a whole, the complete set of rituals is concerned with persons, the community and the cosmos; the created order goes beyond the societal order and includes a concern for the natural world as well. Despite the wide variety of sacrifices, these can be interpreted and understood within four main theoretical types: preventative, restorative, transitional and strengthening of relationship. Each of these has a cluster of interpretative metaphors, invoking, for example, the inoculatory, the purificatory, the apotropaic, *et al.*<sup>570</sup> Because sacrifice is the primary religious act of the ancient world, it is not surprising that a range of different ways of

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<sup>569</sup> *ibid.* 11. Goldingay is here citing R J Daly, The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 26-7.

<sup>570</sup> There are many texts dealing with Old Testament sacrifice. Good recent discussions are Philip Jenson, Graded Holiness (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Frank Gorman, The Ideology of Ritual (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

interpretation has been found to apply to Old Testament sacrifice,<sup>571</sup> but it is important to recognize that any adequate understanding of sacrifice cannot be reduced to any single construal - as Moltmann seems to do - and also that many of the theoretical types are also complementary. Methodologically this point is analogous to Gunton's insistence that an adequate Christian understanding of atonement must be expressed through the full range of soteriological vocabulary, as discussed previously.

The preventative category is basic and fundamental<sup>572</sup> and has two main interpretative metaphors: the apotropaic which is somewhat military in character, and the inoculatory which is rather medical. In the apotropaic, an entity (the sanctuary) or a person (the sacrificer) gains protection from some future danger or attack, which may be some form of impurity or enemies or what may be construed as demonic forces. "Expiation through blood...became necessary because *Adonai* demanded that the forces of impurity, unleashed by the offences committed, be kept away from his immediate environment."<sup>573</sup> In the inoculatory, the sacrifice functions prophylactically and so has the quality of a medicine which prevents a person in danger (the sacrificer) catching a dangerous disease or catching it again. "The sacrificial blood was used to immunize the afflicted person in a magical way against the recurrence of the ailment."<sup>574</sup>

As stated, this category is fundamental and somehow functions paradigmatically, undergirding the other ways of construing atonement. This is essentially because it has to do with covenant. In the Pentateuch, the plague of God's wrath took the form of an outbreak of destruction which was indicative of the breakdown of the created order; 'atonement' protected against this plague.<sup>575</sup> The Levites were installed to make atonement to guard against anyone getting too near to the sanctuary and thereby risking plague (Num. 8.19). Those who continued to support the rebels after the revolt of Korah were under threat of wrath from the Lord. A plague began but Aaron made atonement: he stood with his incense between the dead and the living and stopped it, (Num. 16.47ff).

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<sup>571</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, *op. cit.* 111.

<sup>572</sup> "The defensive character of Old Testament sacrifice is apparent all through." M Fortes, "Preface" in M F C Bourdillion and M Fortes, (eds.) *Sacrifice*, (New York: Academic Press, 1980), xv.

<sup>573</sup> J Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 78.

<sup>574</sup> *ibid.* 73.

<sup>575</sup> See the discussion on page 5 in Margaret Barker, "Atonement: The Rite of Healing", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49/1 (1996): 1-20.



The best known example is that of Phineas, who killed the apostate Israelite and his Midianite wife. (Num. 25.10-13). He made 'atonement'. As a result, he was given the covenant of priesthood, the covenant of peace. The significant point here, apart from atonement stopping the plague again, is that atonement was the ritual associated with covenant: here the covenant of peace, the covenant of the priesthood of eternity, elsewhere called the covenant of eternity or, more recently, *The Cosmic Covenant*. Now covenant is the first of the concepts associated with atonement in the New Testament; the covenant in question must have been this priestly covenant, the eternal covenant.<sup>576</sup>

The restorative category has six interpretative metaphors. There is the notion of the restoration of order in which an act (the sacrificial ritual) corrects a fault (sin or impurity) in a person or entity (the offerer, the world order) and thereby effects restoration. "If individuals entered a state incongruent with good relations with God, they had to undergo rites to restore them to a normative status."<sup>577</sup> There is bodily purification in which a purifying agent (blood) cleans or wipes away dirt (impurity) from a person (the sacrificer) or a place (the sanctuary). "The *hatta*'t blood is the ritual detergent employed by the priest to purge the sanctuary of the impurity inflicted upon it by the offerer of the sacrifice."<sup>578</sup> There is also the concept of the elimination of material in the sense that such 'material' (sin, impurity) is transferred via the laying on of hands to an agent (scapegoat, bird) which then carries the offending 'material' away (from the sanctuary, camp).<sup>579</sup> And also the legal notion of the paying of a (monetary) debt in which the debt (the sacrifice) is paid to the one to whom it is owed (God) by the debtor (the sacrificer): "God in his mercy allowed sinful men to give a ransom payment for their sins, so that they escaped the death penalty that their iniquities merited."<sup>580</sup> There is here an aspect of propitiation in which an acceptable substitute or ransom (the offering) is provided in place of the guilty person (the offerer) and hence is able to take the punishment (death) to satisfy the demands of justice of the one wronged (God). A further interpretative metaphor in the

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<sup>576</sup> *ibid.* 5-6. Atonement as creation and covenant rituals is discussed later. The most graphic account of atonement in the second temple period is in Wisdom 18.20-25, in which the high priest held back the wrath to prevent it reaching the living. R Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992), cited by Barker, *ibid.* 5 n10.

<sup>577</sup> D Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus", 157, in B Lang (ed.) *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, (London: SPCK, 1985) 151-62..

<sup>578</sup> J Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, *op. cit.* 392.

<sup>579</sup> As an example, see Frank Gorman, *op. cit.*, 151-79 for a detailed account of Lev 14.1-20.

<sup>580</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, *op. cit.* 61. It is clear that these interpretative metaphors offered are quite profoundly shaped by commentators' theological presuppositions. This is also the case with Moltmann as demonstrated by his very light touch on the matter of sacrifice.

restorative category - referred to by Eichrodt as "primitive inheritance"<sup>581</sup> - is the mechanical notion of a magical force (impurity, a magical substance) being overcome by an even greater and efficacious force (blood, also a magical substance). And finally, there is the idea of relationality in which the sacrifice serves as mediator. The communication between two parties, i.e. God and humanity, has been interrupted in some way, i.e. by impurity or sin, and needs to be re-established by means of a third party, i.e. the sacrificial animal, who shares the character of both parties.<sup>582</sup>

The strengthening-of-relationship category is invoked by three interpretative metaphors, which comprise a sense both of hierarchical and mutual relationship. The relational notion implicit in gift-giving can be seen when an offerer (the sacrificer) gives a gift (the sacrifice) to a recipient (God) in God's honour or as a thanksgiving. Such an exchange can characterise some sense of mutuality of relationship: "[B]y offering the sacrifice to the holy sphere, the worshipper gives a gift to God."<sup>583</sup> Or the gift-giving can suggest a more hierarchical relation: "[J]ust as an inferior brings a present to his superior, or a client to his patron, or a vassal to his lord, as the normal expression of his subjection and fealty, so the pious worshipper makes an offering to his God."<sup>584</sup> The strengthening of relationship can also be understood in terms of a political tribute in the sense that a due payment (the sacrifice) is given to the overlord (God) by the vassal (the offerer). This is invoked particularly where there is a very high cost involved, such as the total consumption of the valuable whole burnt offering. Or a relationship can be strengthened through the notion of shared food, first, in a basically material sense: "[G]od and man were partakers of the meal in common (the Peace offerings)";<sup>585</sup> "[T]he participants knew Yahweh to be invisibly present as the guest of honour."<sup>586</sup> And secondly, food sharing can be seen more in terms of a coming together in participation: "...the fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice is sacramental communion."<sup>587</sup> There is a socially symbolic sense also within this category of strengthening of relationships whereby the structure of society (the

<sup>581</sup> W Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament II, transl. J Baker, (London: SCM, 1964) 158.

<sup>582</sup> Philip Jenson, Graded Holiness *op. cit.* 153, developing anthropological analysis from Hubert and Mauss, Essay on Sacrifice, transl. WD Halls (Chicago: Cohen and West, 1964) 97: "This procedure (of sacrifice) consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds through the mediation of a victim."

<sup>583</sup> J Pederson, Israel: Its Life and Culture III-IV (London: Oxford UP, 1940) 322.

<sup>584</sup> W Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament II, *op. cit.* 144.

<sup>585</sup> J Pederson, Israel: Its Life and Culture III-IV *op. cit.* 334.

<sup>586</sup> Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology I, transl. D M G Stalker, (London: SCM, 1962) 257.

<sup>587</sup> Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, (London: DLT, 1961) 452.



social groups) is modelled by an object (the sacrifice) which is made similar to it (the sacrificial parts) and thereby represents it: "[T]he way in which the various parts are distributed provides a three-dimensional spatial model of social relationships ...(providing an) image of Israelite society in an alimentary code."<sup>588</sup>

And finally, there is the transitional category which 'enables' the movement from a past state to another future state. This is a social category and might apply both to individuals and to the wider community. It might pertain to covenant, that is, in the sense that the offering enables a group (the children of Abraham) to move from one status to another (the covenant people of God), or it may relate to ordination in the way that the offering enables a person or group of persons (Aaron and his sons) to move from one status (non-priests) to another (holy priests). Thus the sacrifice enables movement between the profane and the sacred, between this world and the holy realm and so is providing a way for human beings to share in the divine life.

In Eden God takes the initiative in providing a sacramental means whereby the divine life is shared with human beings through their eating the fruit of a certain tree. East of Eden human beings follow God's example and offer God of their produce and their flocks. The mutual giving of fruit, produce, and flocks is designed to express the relationship between God and humanity, to facilitate movement between people and God. Sacrifice facilitates movement between different worlds. It is a ferry boat between heaven and earth...a '*rite de passage*'.<sup>589</sup>

But, it might be asked, what do these Old Testament rituals have to do with New Testament understandings of atonement and more specifically with a Christian construal of comprehensive cosmic redemption? After all, did not Dillistone consider that cosmic reconciliation in Christianity was the legacy of the later importation of pagan thought rather than derived from Hebrew beliefs and practices? "It was not until early Christian witnesses found themselves confronted by pagan systems in which a full theory of cosmic redemption played a prominent

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<sup>588</sup> Philip Jenson, *Graded Holiness op. cit.* 178.

<sup>589</sup> John Goldingay, (ed.) *Atonement Today op. cit.* 13. Goldingay notes also how this 'ferryboat' imagery has been much used in recent times within Christianity. Christopher Cocksworth observes its use already in Luther's comments on Hebrews 10.19-22 where Christ is the ferryman who transports us in safety from the earthly realm to heaven. 'The Cross, Our Worship and Our Living', in John Goldingay, (ed.) *Atonement Today op. cit.* 111-127.



part that the effect of the work of Christ upon the cosmos at large began to receive serious consideration."<sup>590</sup>

This is not the case. Rather, the cosmic theory of atonement has its origins directly in the Jerusalem temple and not in paganism.<sup>591</sup> The repair of the world was always already a part of what was acted out in Hebrew atonement practices, and this belief continued into Christianity from the outset. "The book (Leviticus) presents a fallen world, in the respect at least that some of the beasts fail to conform to that which things were, in their integrity, created to be. And so it is with the New Testament, although the focus of clean and unclean is different ..."<sup>592</sup> Gunton is concerned here with matters of continuity and supersessionism. Christian tradition understood immediately that Jesus brought about radical changes in the way the law was apprehended and interpreted, and that he himself reinterpreted it so as to appear to negate it: for example, Mark 7.14ff might be taken to be an attack on Levitical categories and codes. But Gunton stresses the crucial importance of understanding this reinterpretation within the context of the Old Testament as the *shaper* of the New: "...theological formulations of the situation have often failed to treat with due seriousness the indispensable part of the Old Testament in shaping a Christian understanding of the law. The notion, dating from early Christian times, that Jesus formulated a new law is dangerously subject to a supersessionist reading, and certainly has been, indicating a besetting weakness of the tradition ever since."<sup>593</sup>

Early Christianity comes to us clothed in the garments of an existing belief system. The New Testament writers assumed a traditional understanding of the temple practices and the mythology of atonement, and gave expression to new interpretations of the law which they couched in these known terms. While it is broadly recognised that key New Testament notions such as covenant, justification, righteousness and grace must somehow be related to the central issue

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<sup>590</sup> F W Dillistone, The Christian Understanding of Atonement, *op. cit.* 47.

<sup>591</sup> Margaret Barker, "Atonement: The Rite of Healing", *op. cit.* 2.

<sup>592</sup> Colin Gunton, Intellect and Action, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 84-5.

<sup>593</sup> *ibid.* 85-6. Gunton cites Irenaeus' view of the relation between the Testaments that the difference is quantitative rather than qualitative. Alluding to Matthew 13.52 - 'here is one greater than the temple' - Irenaeus observes: 'but *greater* and *less* are not applied to those things which have nothing in common between themselves, and are of an opposite nature, and mutually repugnant; but are used in the case of those of the same substance, and which possess properties in common, but merely differ in number and size...' Against the Heresies, 4.9.2. So also Calvin: 'the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same.' Institutes, II.x.2. See also Francis Watson, Text and Truth. Redefining Biblical Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp 127-76 for critique of the inherent Marcionism in much modern biblical interpretation.



of atonement, the pattern of practices and meanings, as an integrated whole, no longer has the framework that rendered its intelligibility. "When the rituals had ceased and the myths were no longer recognised for what they really were, the key to understanding the imagery of atonement was lost."<sup>594</sup>

And the key to understanding the imagery of atonement is inextricably bound up with understanding the problematic Hebrew word which translates atonement - *kipper* - and which is understood through a range of associations, and whose meaning tends to be derived from a given functional context. Its biblical context is most closely approximated by the term 'composition' in its legal sense (given its cognate term *kôpher* meaning compository payment) and it is associated with the settling of differences. (It might be understood as a kind of settlement involving some partial payment, that is, a form of compensation.)

An imbalance between two parties (individuals, families, clans or larger social groupings) results from a damage or a deprivation inflicted upon one by the other. Equilibrium is restored by a process which consists of a transfer of something of value (a person, an animal, or a commutation of such in the form of commodity or currency) from the injuring party to the injured....To offer or make composition, to accept composition is the basic force of *kipper*. In the cult system, the necessity to effect composition through an offering ...accounts for the metonymic extension of *kipper*...Since composition is a prerequisite for forgiveness, the metonymic extension of *kipper* in quite another direction can be discerned in its meanings - remove, wipe away, erase, annul, and even upon occasion, to expiate.<sup>595</sup>

Douglas offers a wide set of meanings which allude to the ecological, broadly understood: "[A]ccording to the illustrative cases in Leviticus, to atone means to cover or recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering. As a noun, what is translated atonement, expiation or purgation means integument made good; conversely, the examples in the book indicate that defilement means integument torn."<sup>596</sup>

Understanding 'atonement' in these ways is surely suggestive of the repair of the created order that has been broken variously by sin, and evocative of the cosmic

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<sup>594</sup> Margaret Barker, "Atonement: The Rite of Healing", *op. cit.* 2.

<sup>595</sup> C B Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement," Hebrew College Union Annual 47 (1976): 19-55.

<sup>596</sup> Mary Douglas, "Atonement in Leviticus," Jewish Studies Quarterly 1 (1993-4): 117-8.

covenant: the eternal covenant which is a system of bonds that both establishes and maintains creation, that binds and orders the forces of chaos. The holding together of creation and redemption associates atonement with the cosmic covenant and therefore atonement rituals can be understood as creation and covenant rituals.<sup>597</sup> *Kipper* should be seen as closely associated with *tikkun* (redemption; *tikkun ol'am* - repair of the world) in terms of the overall eschatological goal of *shalom*. As Gunton says, "The sacrificial system must surely be understood at least in part as the divine dispensation for dealing with certain forms of disorder, human and cosmic alike..."<sup>598</sup> The concerns of Leviticus are focused precisely towards Israel's appropriate and God-ordained habitation of God's creation and all that this entails: relationships between persons and between human and non-human beings,<sup>599</sup> sexual relations, the loss of life-bearing bodily fluids, the fabric of clothing and the possession, indwelling and cultivation of the land, i.e. the earth that is the Lord's. These are "all matters which, for all our differences from that era, are also at the heart of our moral and cosmic ecology."<sup>600</sup>

Furthermore, the liturgical order of temple sacrifices is itself reflective of a conceptual relationship with the creation account in Genesis 1.1-2.4a, and the Priestly tradition affirms that the appointed times of the liturgical order prescribed in Numbers 28-29 have been built into the very structure of the created order. The original act of the ordering of creation is marked by the ritual offering of sacrifices.

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<sup>597</sup> See the discussion of the activities in the temple in Margaret Barker, "Atonement: The Rite of Healing", *op. cit.* 7. "...we must consider the temple, the place where atonement was effected. The temple was the meeting place of heaven and earth, time and eternity. The holy of holies, the place of the throne of the LORD was simultaneously heaven and earth...The traditions say that it was an exact replica of the service of heaven. Moses had been given the plan of the tabernacle, not just its construction, but the details of the vestments, the incense and oils, the priesthood and the sacrifices (Exod.25-30). Or David had given Solomon a comprehensive plan of the temple which he had received from the LORD (1 Chron 28.11-19 cf 11QT). The furnishings of the temple were those of heaven; Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD (1 Chron 29.23)...The implication of this belief must be that what was performed in the temple 'was' the service of heaven and so the rite of atonement must have had a heavenly counterpart, for want of better words."

<sup>598</sup> Colin Gunton, *Intellect and Action*, *op. cit.* 90.

<sup>599</sup> Bauckham observes that Jewish literature envisaged the restoration of the originally intended relationship between humans and animals, and that the eschatological expectation of the righting of all wrongs in the future messianic age would bring about that harmonious state. He is specifically discussing Mark 1.13, but also cites Hosea's promise of the renewal of God's covenant with God's people which, when their punishment is over, includes also a covenant that God makes with the animals for their sake (Hos. 2.18). Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals", in Joel B Green and Max Turner (eds.) *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-21. See also R Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, *op. cit.* 27-32: Murray considers the whole passage of Hos.2.2-23 is turning on the covenant of 2.18.

<sup>600</sup> Colin Gunton, *Intellect and Action*, *op. cit.* 90.



The natural order has structure, order, and meaning given to it, placed upon it, in the construction of the yearly liturgical order. Thus, the appointed ritual moments become one means in which society participates in, gives support to, and helps to realize the ongoing existence, structure, and meaning of the divinely created order....The morning and evening sacrifices point to the divinely established order of creation and serve to impose a ritual order on it. The sacrifices thus serve to sustain the division of day and night at creation and, thus, to sustain the order established at creation. The recurring cycle of day and night become signs of the order of creation; the daily sacrifices are one means of sustaining that order in that they are prescribed ritual moments designed to mark the division between day and night.<sup>601</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that Moltmann has too limited an understanding of Old Testament sacrificial concepts, and moreover does not appreciate their rich variety of function. He *does* attempt to differentiate between Israel's cult and other cults, but nevertheless even here he restricts the Jerusalem Temple's offerings to 'sin' offerings:

Among the cults of many cultures one finds the sacrifice of animals as a way of softening the wrath of the gods which has been aroused by human injustice. In Israel it was different - certainly, in the Old Testament a sacrifice for sin also existed. It was the so-called 'scapegoat', given by God so the sins of the people could be passed onto it and sent out into the wilderness...In Solomon's Temple there were also similar expiation rituals. According to the prophet Isaiah, God was to send a new 'Servant of Yahweh' to remove the sins of the people...God suffers 'for us' and 'for many', taking our place.<sup>602</sup>

Moltmann tries to suggest the comparative sophistication of Israel's cult, but his discussion here is inadequate, and incorrect in its basics. The Temple expiatory sacrifices were not all the same as the Scapegoat: there were a great many Temple

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<sup>601</sup> Frank Gorman, The Ideology of Ritual, *op. cit.* 219.

<sup>602</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Passion of Christ and the Suffering of God', *op. cit.* 26. In his limited appreciation of Old Testament ritual practices Moltmann is likely influenced by the rather negative evaluation of Hebrew religion as somehow crude that is present in Wellhausen, as discussed previously, and was prevalent in the Old Testament scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Eichrodt's Theology of the Old Testament II, *op. cit.* demonstrates similar shortcomings. For example, "[T]he worship of the second temple was an antiquarian resuscitation of forms which had lost their intimate connection with the national life and therefore had lost the greater part of their original significance." W Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (London, 1927) 216. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus *op. cit.* and Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, (London: Doubleday, 1991) consider that a lack of understanding of the meaning of the Day of Atonement is analogous to a lack of understanding of Israelite religion.



sacrifices, but even just taking those that could be deemed expiatory, (and, as shown, a good many more were not), there was also a rich variety of these. As observed, he speaks only of expiatory sacrifices 'to remove the sins of the people': these fall within both the restorative and preventative groups. While these groups together have a range of eight interpretative metaphors, the Scapegoat is most obviously interpreted by one, that is, material elimination in the restorative category. It also has resonances of the restoration of the created order and the mediation and renewal of relationships, which are implications and 'results' of sacrifice of which Moltmann seems unaware. Other expiatory sacrifices can be interpreted variously, for example bodily purification, which is restorative and also applies to 'place' as well as to persons, or apotropaic in a military sense, which is preventative. Suffice to say, Moltmann seems to have a severely limited understanding of the sacrificial system in ancient Israel. It is clear that he imposes a substitutionary and expiatory thrust as an interpretation of all these rituals, despite their problematic nature which suggests that the fullness of their meaning is far from readily understood. He has no sense of sacrifice as relational, either as gift or as communion, and he clearly has no appreciation of the covenant context of sacrifice nor its cosmic and eschatological implications.

Ideas of expiation are important insofar as they show how little the unrighteous person can alone achieve for him/herself, and that any new future requires repentance and the direct action of God. Nevertheless, Moltmann has it that "expiation for sins always has a retrospective character. Its future concern is the *restitutio in integrum*, not the beginning of a new life."<sup>603</sup> But he lacks any appreciation that cultic sacrifice ensured the *maintenance* of good relationships with the Creator and this surely has an orientation towards the future. Indeed, "[P]riestly rituals function to make statements about these categories (space, time and status) and the world of creation and, when necessary, to change them....Ritual was not only a way of acting, it was also a way of thinking, speaking, and creating."<sup>604</sup>

And in the context of expiation in the Old Testament, Moltmann does not connect this with its vital underpinning, which is holiness. And here he surely misses an opportunity to connect with the matter at issue: the redemption of nature. Considering our contemporary moral questions concerning ecology and the environment, Gunton asks if these are "merely a moral reaction to modern

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<sup>603</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, *op. cit.* 183.

<sup>604</sup> Frank Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, *op. cit.* 234



exploitation of the beast, or are there deeper currents, involving what is recognisably a concern for the kind of cleansing that is intrinsically related to a theology of sacrifice, with *holiness*?"<sup>605</sup> The latter is the case. Holiness has to do with the basic distinction between God as Creator and God's creation. It signifies the incomparable otherness of God. At the same time this wholly different God wills to be in relationship with human creatures and wills that Israel in particular should somehow reflect God's holiness in its relationship to the nations by being a holy people ("You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" - Lev 19.2). This forms part of the holy Creator God's purposes for the good of humanity as a whole. In willing the good and in willing life, God wills that all of life should be lived in an orderly fashion.

The Old Testament reflects the view that a life-threatening disorder has, however, disrupted the good order established by God in creation. Such disorder was expressed in a number of ways - as a chaos invading creation on a grand scale, as a contagion that affected physical life, and as moral contamination. Leviticus focuses especially on worship as the heart of God's relationship with Israel and as the sphere in which an order which will affect the whole of life (including the land, cf. Lev. 18.25-28; 20.22-24; 26.3-6,14-20) is to be established. The place in which God's presence was held to be especially manifested and available - the tabernacle and its holy of holies - has therefore to be kept free from the threat of disorder. Access to the presence of the holy God has to be properly managed, human impurity has to be dealt with, and in the process appropriate distinctions between what is holy and profane, what is clean and unclean, have to be made. Mixing categories, with the accompanying improper exchange of matters belonging to different spheres, not only brings disorder but can drive God from the sanctuary.

Since impurity could occur simply in the course of everyday living and moral transgressions were also a feature of Israel's life, God made provision for dealing with this uncleanness through the sacrificial system which culminated in the rituals of the Day of Atonement. "For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord" (Lev 16:30). In the centre of this day's rituals was the mercy seat over which God's presence was manifested and which had to be sprinkled with the blood of sacrificial animals if atonement for sin was to be made. Both "atonement" and "mercy seat" come from the same verb (*kipper*) and signal that Israel's uncleanness

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<sup>605</sup> Colin Gunton, *Intellect and Action*, *op. cit.* 85.



had to be covered if a holy God was to dwell among the people. So even within a purely expiatory category, the sacrificial act should be construed as relational, as the maintenance of relationships which has a future orientation rather than a merely retrospective thrust. At the heart of sacrifice is communion with God.

In the process both the threat to the profanation of God's name through Israel acting in ways that were incongruous with God's character and the threat to the community through pollution were taken care of, God's presence in the sanctuary could once again be counted on, and a relationship to this God that had become distorted could be rehabilitated. The cultic arrangements make possible and mediate the presence of God in the midst of Israel. Priests are part of this mediating process, needing first to be made holy so that they can represent God's purity and then guarantee the proper order that will keep impurity at bay.

Priests offer sacrifices for the people. In the sacrificial system God provides the means for dealing with the impurity that prevents the people from being in relationship with their holy God. To this end various types of sacrifice are brought by the people. Two particular forms of gifts and sacrifices are established in Leviticus 4-5. The "sin offering" enables purification by dealing with the stain that particular acts can bring on a person, while the "guilt offering" enables restitution by dealing with the guilt and indebtedness caused by sin, which would render the transgressor liable to punishment (cf. Lev 5.17).

Blood and death play an interesting role in this system of holiness. On the one hand, contact with death in a variety of forms and especially with corpses pollutes and blood, when lost in violent death or in menstruation, defiles. On the other hand, sacrifices are the means of the restoration of holiness and these sacrifices paradoxically involve blood and death. Indeed, the blood of the sacrificial victim stands for life taken violently through death. "It is the blood that makes atonement" (Lev 17.11); "it is not the case that the animal's death is the climax of the rite. What is central is what is done with its blood and with fire."<sup>606</sup> In this way, sacrificial blood becomes the means of transition from the sphere of the unholy to the sphere of the holy, and the smoke rising from the burnt offerings of the sacrifices can be seen to represent the passage from the seen to the unseen world, from the earthly to the heavenly.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> John Goldingay, *Atonement Today*, *op. cit.* 12.

<sup>607</sup> H Hubert and M Mauss, *Essays on Sacrifice*, *op. cit.* 97.



If the world of Leviticus seems alien to modern sensibilities, Brueggemann<sup>608</sup> warns against simply dismissing it as primitive and sees different sorts of threats, such as that posed by the toxic contamination from nuclear waste, as analogues in our world. Those who lived through the foot and mouth disaster in the UK in 2001 also experienced something analogous to ancient Israel's experience of life-threatening impurity. The virus that spread impurity through herds of cattle and flocks of sheep threatened the livelihood of whole communities and produced a response where the slaughter of thousands of animals was seen as a necessity to keep it at bay. The English countryside was marred by the sight of smoke rising from holocausts of animals in an attempt to stop the spread of contagion and to restore order and health to rural life. The threat from impurity was further brought home by the rituals of disinfecting which the public had to go through on entering and leaving affected areas.

Moltmann's truncated understanding of the richness of sacrifice - his blind spot perhaps - has further implications. For it leads him into what must be described as another mistake. For a theologian who insists on bringing the scriptural text to bear on cultural phenomena, and vice versa - 'no text without context, no context without text' - he has been led astray by his blind spot. He writes:

Historically, the ideas about atonement and reconciliation evidently go back to the Jewish-Christian community. There, Jesus' death was already interpreted early on as expiation, and the preaching of the cross echoed with the ideas about expiatory sacrifice found in Lev. 16, and with the reminiscences of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. 'That Christ died for our sins according to the scripture' (1 Cor. 15.3b) is an ancient Jewish-Christian conception which Paul presupposed and accepted. With the help of this idea, the salvific meaning of Christ's death 'for us' could well be expressed in a limited framework: as expiatory sacrifice Christ takes our sins and God's judgment on himself, and saves us from them and their consequences. But a 'scapegoat' like this, that 'takes away the sin of the world', and even a Suffering Servant of God on whom lies 'the chastisement that made us whole' are bound to disappear once the sin disappears. In either pattern of ideas, the return of this 'scapegoat' or 'Suffering Servant' by way of resurrection is inconceivable. Applied to Christ's death, the concepts about expiation say that the cause of our suffering is our sin, the cause of Christ's suffering is God's gracious will, the purpose of his suffering is the restoration on our behalf of the broken covenant. It is immediately evident that these ideas about salvation can be

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<sup>608</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 191-2.

applied to Christ's death, but not to his resurrection, so as to relate that death to the restoration of a covenant with God which is the premise of the idea.<sup>609</sup>

Moltmann is claiming that the scapegoat and vicarious suffering servant disappear once the sin disappears and their return by way of resurrection is inconceivable. He considers reconciliation to be a backward-looking act, whereas resurrection promises something totally new, that the world will be transformed and newly created. For him, atonement, sacrifice and reconciliation together form a limited category as opposed to justification and righteousness in the New Testament. "The category of righteousness ... (as opposed to reconciliation)... is both central and fundamental."<sup>610</sup> And Moltmann goes on to claim that 'reconciliation' only has emphasis 'to any considerable degree' in Ephesians and Colossians, and that in the original Pauline correspondence 'ideas about atonement and reconciliation are integrated into the event of the divine righteousness.'<sup>611</sup> But this is inaccurate, in fact, it is a reductionist view. Moltmann overlooks that in 2 Cor. 5. 17-20 and also in Rom. 5. 9-11 it is reconciliation that is the primary category into which the other concepts of justification and righteousness are integrated. It gives a false picture to claim any particular priority overall, for no single term is determinative within the New Testament. The concepts are all integrated: righteousness, justification, reconciliation and the sacrificial, and redemption, for which the slave market provides the terminology.<sup>612</sup>

And furthermore, certainly he neglects to note that sacrifice is, in fact, the dominant metaphor in one New Testament document, namely, The Letter to the Hebrews. Ford<sup>613</sup> has pointed out that the most fully developed theology of the death of Jesus in the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews, is narrated in terms of priesthood and temple sacrifice. And Gunton observes that for the writer to the Hebrews the "almost sole source of metaphor is the world of priesthood and sacrifice,"<sup>614</sup> and also reiterates Caird's remark that because of a basic human abhorrence of sin as pollution, "the New Testament so constantly employs the language of sacrifice to declare the benefits of the Cross."<sup>615</sup> Other New Testament christological images involving sacrifice would also be worth exploring.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 187-8.

<sup>610</sup> *ibid.* 187.

<sup>611</sup> *ibid.* Moltmann says he is here following Käsemann's exegesis.

<sup>612</sup> I am grateful to Professor Andrew T Lincoln for clarification and confirmation on this matter.

<sup>613</sup> David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 208.

<sup>614</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 61.

<sup>615</sup> *ibid.* 127.

<sup>616</sup> For example, Santmire has mooted the idea of developing the Johannine image of the Good Shepherd as the cosmic Good Shepherd, which is an interesting idea, for, like Shekhinah, this



Hebrews' use of the sacrificial metaphor shows that none of Moltmann's claims need be the case. Its use within an eschatological framework provides an emphatic reminder that until the consummation sin does not disappear and therefore remains a problem to be dealt with even within the new order that has been inaugurated. "Shakable things belong to the visible world and will perish. The created order is not inherently bad, but it is limited and inadequate as an object for faith. The exalted Christ, however, remains forever (1.10-12), and his priesthood endures for all time (7.24), so that his kingdom is a proper object for faith."<sup>617</sup>

It is ironic that Moltmann, for whom 'eschatology is the ground of all theology' overlooks the eschatological thrust of the language of sacrifice. Hebrews unites death and resurrection through its notion of the exalted cosmic Christ who makes his once for all sacrifice continually available and effective through his living presence before God as high priest. Christ's role as sacrificial victim and as high priest makes him the mediator of a covenant that entails not simply the restoration of a previous relationship with God but establishes something radically new: a new covenant based on the power of Christ's indestructible life, and introducing a better hope and making the old covenant obsolete (7.15-19; 8.6-13). "Hebrews does not deny that previous generations...could draw near to God, but the author contrasts the limited effectiveness of the former priesthood with the absolute effectiveness of Christ's priesthood."<sup>618</sup> What is more, for Hebrews the hope guaranteed by the exalted Christ's presentation of his sacrifice in the presence of God is precisely for a newly created world, the world to come (2.5) brought about by a radical shake-up and removal of the present cosmos (12.26-29).

Of course, in Hebrews the sacrificial metaphor for Christ's death is employed to speak of the benefits of his saving work for humanity. But its Old Testament presuppositions, with which Hebrews works, and its relation in the thought of Hebrews, both to the role of the cosmic Christ and to the eschatological hope for all things (*ta panta*), open up the possibility of developing its significance for the non-human realm.

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'cosmic Good Shepherd bears all creatures' and 'leads the whole cosmic flock to a new and eternal pasture,' by laying down his life. Paul Santmire, "So That He Might Fill All Things," *Dialog* 42/3 (2003): 257-78.

<sup>617</sup> C Koester, *Hebrews* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 552-3.

<sup>618</sup> *ibid.* 362.



The categories from Leviticus and the sense of reality they represent provide the way into the world of Hebrews and its perspective on Christ's person and work. In the worldview of Hebrews the holy God remains sovereign, awesome and terrifying. "Our God is a consuming fire" who is to be worshipped with reverence and awe (12;28,29). This recalls the depiction of God both at Sinai - "Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain" (Exod 24:17) - and before the entry into the land - "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" (Deut 4.24). "The awful holiness of God requires distance between God and people, a cultic separation... such separation was necessary in Hebrew thought not in order to protect the holy from defilement but to protect the profane from the threat of the holy. The Israelites in the wilderness kept their distance from the holy one revealing himself in the darkness of the cloud (Ex. 20.20-1)."<sup>619</sup>

It is only when such a God has made the appropriate provision for humans to be in the divine presence that such a presence no longer consumes and judges. That provision makes humans holy, purges, perfects and sanctifies them by delivering them from the guilt and power of sin and from the death that is sin's consequence. For Hebrews, God's provision is now embodied in a person and, if the necessary holiness and perfection of humanity is to be achieved, this agent of salvation needs to be identified with the holy God but also identified with humanity in a way that somehow shares its condition without being personally tainted by it and that at the same time is able to change that condition. Hence the logic of substitution and representation.

He brings us to the Father as one of us, but does so as one who, because he is God incarnate, is able to do so. That is what is meant by the ancient teaching that Christ is our mediator....[J]ust as the notion of substitution derives largely from metaphors of legality ...so that of representation takes its heart from the world of sacrifice. When the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the author and pioneer of our faith, it is saying that he represents us as man before God in order that we too may participate in a like relationship. Thus representation and substitution are two sides of the one relationship, with Jesus taking our place before God so that we ourselves may come, reconciled, before God.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Christopher Cocksworth, 'The Cross, Our Worship and Our Living', *op. cit.* 113.

<sup>620</sup> Colin Gunton, Actuality of Atonement, *op. cit.* 167.



There is a further irony. Moltmann invokes the Suffering Servant, but only to dismiss him in terms of any future, post-resurrection relevance. And so, Moltmann's 'blind spot' about sacrifice leads not only to his making an error in his reading of scripture, but also to his overlooking what is surely an opportunity for him to develop his 'suffering' imagery. He works with the suffering God, the suffering cosmic Christ and the suffering cosmic Spirit. He could also have developed the notion of the suffering cosmic Servant in interesting ways involving the language of mediation, priesthood and sacrifice. However, he would not see this, indeed he could not see this, precisely because he has wrongly written off sacrifice *a priori* as lacking any future orientation.

Hebrews may again offer a way forward. Its cosmic christology is a rich theological resource. The prologue (1.1-4) already relates Christ's sacrificial role and his cosmic status. The Son is the one through whom the world is created and who sustains all things. Not surprisingly, therefore, he also has an eschatological role as the heir of all things. But this cosmic Christ is the same figure as the incarnate Jesus who, having made purification for sins, has now been exalted to God's right hand. If, in line with Old Testament assumptions about impurity and sin, not only humans but also the rest of creation have been tainted by impurity and disorder, then it follows that, if Christ is to inherit the consummated cosmos, his work of purification has to be effective for the whole of creation.

Christ's inheritance of all things is developed in 2.5-9 with its use of Ps. 8 to picture the world to come as subject already in principle to the exalted Christ as the representative human. All things are to be brought under his control, an achievement made possible by his suffering death for the sake of all. The death that has a hold over humans pervades the rest of creation, so Christ's suffering solidarity with humans, which is stressed in what follows in 2.10-18, can be extended to his suffering solidarity with all creation, if that creation is to be part of his eschatological rule.

It is Christ's present cosmic status as exalted to heaven that gives his sacrificial work a forward-looking significance, so that it is not only a particular event of the past but one that has universal and ongoing effectiveness. The power of his indestructible life, demonstrated in the resurrection, qualifies him to be high priest (7.16) and his exaltation establishes him as a high priest who is "for ever" and who therefore always makes effective intercession (7.24,25). The formulation of the manner of Christ's sacrifice is significant. It is "through the eternal Spirit" (9.14).



This fuses sacrificial imagery with an aspect of early Christian tradition about the resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 1.4; 8.11; 1 Pet. 3.18). Here Christ's sacrifice is given its continued effectiveness through the power of the same Spirit.

His exaltation gives Christ's sacrifice a scope that goes beyond the human realm. Under the law the tabernacle and all the vessels and almost everything was sprinkled with blood and purified (9.21,22). Since this was so, Hebrews argues, the heavenly things also need purifying but with a better sacrifice. This Christ accomplished when he entered heaven with the offering of his own blood (9.24-27). The reference to heavenly things is significant. Both earth and heaven, that is, the whole cosmos, need purifying. "Since sin affects all creation, Christ's work extends to all creation."<sup>621</sup>

But Moltmann has not taken this route in his cosmic christology and eschatology. Instead, he has, in fact, taken a different path, and developed the Shekhinah<sup>622</sup> imagery invoking a suffering cosmic Shekhinah who is God's eschatological presence with God's people, who will accompany them, share in and bear their sufferings and bring them to their resting place: the *shalom* of the Sabbath. Moltmann has always worked with the idea of the Sabbath as God's final dwelling place, and invokes the notion that we are still in the six days as his way of understanding the creation story in seven days. He cites the Shekhinah as one of the 'two great concepts' to use as a way of understanding the self-differentiation and the tension of God in God's creation. The other great concept is Trinity. "Through the Son, God creates, reconciles and redeems his creation. In the power of the Spirit, God is himself present in his creation - present in his reconciliation and his redemption of that creation."<sup>623</sup>

The Spirit is God's immanent presence<sup>624</sup> in the world that God creates, and Moltmann develops the descent of the Spirit on Jesus and its resting on him in such a way that the Spirit should be interpreted as God's Shekhinah.<sup>625</sup> Thus it is

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<sup>621</sup> C Koester, *Hebrews op. cit.* 421.

<sup>622</sup> The Divine presence. The Bible refers to God's dwelling in the midst of the children of Israel (Exod 13.21-2; 40;34-8). Later the concept of the Shekhinah embodied God's presence in the world with the people as a whole and with individuals sharing in Israel's suffering and exile, In kabbalistic sources the term 'shekhinah' refers to the tenth sephirah (manifestation of God), representing God's feminine aspect.

<sup>623</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation, op. cit.* 15.

<sup>624</sup> But Gunton is anxious to stress that the Spirit is God's eschatological transcendence. *Theology Through the Theologians, op. cit.* 122.

<sup>625</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life, op. cit.* 61.



the Spirit that is the real determining subject of the relationship between God and Christ, and this determining subject is Shekhinah. Moltmann uses the story of the Shekhinah accompanying the people into exile to be God's continuing, comforting presence with them in their pain and suffering, and to be their hope for their return, as an analogy for Christian hope for the new heaven and the new earth. He draws on the closing of Ezekiel's vision (40-48) to make plain that hope for the homecoming of the Shekhinah is eschatological hope, for the promise made is that the dwelling will be 'for ever'.

The End-time revelation of God's glory is linked with the final return of the Shekhinah, which is no longer under threat. The glory which fills heaven and earth is identical with the Shekhinah which dwelt in the sanctuary....Israel's eschatological hope for the final indwelling of God is the foundation of the Christian hope for the new heaven and the new earth.<sup>626</sup>

This brief discussion of Moltmann's use of the Shekhinah is included essentially as a way of returning to the possibilities inherent in a cosmic suffering servant idea as an atonement metaphor of sacrifice which serves to embrace all things. Moltmann is very eclectic in his thinking and in the sources he uses for developing theological ideas particularly Jewish kabbalistic ideas.<sup>627</sup> And he sees it in his theological task to engage in any productive dialogue, with Christians and non-Christians. For example, he explored Jewish messianic ideas in The Way of Jesus Christ, and made use of the kabbalistic doctrine of *zimsum*<sup>628</sup> in God in Creation. The Shekhinah is a rich and fruitful way for him to discuss the actions of the Spirit and invoke Wisdom ideas. Moltmann has designated her as Spirit in The Spirit of Life, and has associated the Spirit with all created things in God in Creation; resting on Jesus, Shekhinah has agency in "the glorifying of God in the world (which) embraces the salvation and eternal life of human beings, the deliverance of all created things, and the peace of the new creation."<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Coming of God, *op. cit.* 304-5.

<sup>627</sup> Michael Lodahl considers that Moltmann, in his attempts to adapt Jewish concepts in his theological construction, tends to "co-opt them and force them into a Christian baptism which robs them of their distinct Jewish identity and integrity." In particular, he objects to Moltmann using Jewish ideas on the one hand, while on the other hand making a confessional claim such that 'we can only talk about God's suffering in trinitarian terms. In monotheism it is impossible.' Lodahl has a point; though, as a Process thinker, he also has his own issues on the agenda. Shekhinah Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion, (Mahwah: Paulist, 1992), 29.

<sup>628</sup> The space God makes within Godself for any other reality.

<sup>629</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, The Coming of God, *op. cit.* xvi.

But would not a development of the ideas inherent in the notion of a Suffering cosmic Servant offer as much as Shekhinah, and more? The cosmic Shekhinah provides an evocative tapestry, to be sure, but the Suffering Servant figure from Isaiah has been embraced within the tradition of Christian thought, and hence is more satisfying, Christian theologically. In order to speak soteriologically, we need a christological focus; Gunton offers a helpful and timely reminder:

...we are not to succumb to the temptation to baptise everything of which we happen to approve at the time to the work of the Spirit...[A] concern for ecology may well be the work of the Spirit, but unless submitted to christological testing will be simply a reflection of the fashionable trends of the age....The Son is the mode of God's immanence in the world, in which he is witness not to himself, but to the Father. The Spirit is God's eschatological transcendence, his futurity, as it is sometimes expressed. He is God present to the world as its liberating other, bringing it to the destiny determined by the Father, made actual, realised, in the Son.<sup>630</sup>

In the present context, that is, in this study, the Suffering Servant offers the opportunity to speak of atonement in potentially helpful ways. Admittedly, Moltmann would not like this! But the proposal is that the Suffering Servant figure might be understood as a particular development of cosmic christology to function as an atonement metaphor expressed in terms of sacrifice. Moltmann's own demand is that "[T]oday a cosmic christology has to confront Christ the Redeemer with a nature which human beings have plunged into chaos, infected with poisonous waste and condemned to universal death."<sup>631</sup> He resists this conclusion, of course, but is he not calling for a purifying agent to deal with the infection from poisonous waste? Does this not invite the language of sacrifice? How might matter be transformed? Ford has suggested the dead face of Christ on the cross might be used metaphorically and symbolically in a range of ways: "[O]ne way of talking about God, human existence, sin, evil and physicality is in terms of the dynamic of facing. It can also be developed to connect with other ways of talking about atonement: sacrifice in relation to the worship, presence and favour of God;...the physicality and bodyliness of a salvation that takes up the whole of creation, gloriously embodying it in a transfigured face - transformed matter!"<sup>632</sup>

<sup>630</sup> Colin Gunton, *Theology Through the Theologians*, *op. cit.* 122.

<sup>631</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 275.

<sup>632</sup> David Ford, 'The Face on the Cross', *op. cit.* 221.



The proposal here is to embody this salvation in an atonement metaphor of the suffering cosmic Servant: an analogue of Moltmann's suffering God, which he has reiterated in analogous categories as the suffering cosmic Christ and the suffering cosmic Spirit. The Christ who is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is also the High Priest of Hebrews: 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.' (53.5) Through his obedient suffering which culminates in his sacrificial death he is qualified to be High Priest, (Heb. 5.8-10). As the High Priest he takes his sacrificial death before the presence of God, and becomes God's word of promise, (Heb. 6.18-20). That is, the High priest becomes the guarantee of the future world, (Heb. 7.19-22).

In other words, because Christ's sacrifice is so integrally related to his high priesthood, it also participates in the dynamic of eschatological hope. In fact, Hebrews as a whole can be seen to be an exhortation to a community of Jewish Christians to draw near to God with confidence and to persevere in hope, because Christ's heavenly high priesthood is the new covenant promise, guaranteed by oath, of the world to come.

...although the cross is the *critical* point in the perfecting of Jesus, the *climactic* moment happens as the crucified but risen Jesus of Nazareth 'enters heaven itself', the sanctuary of God's presence, the holy sabbath rest of the fulfilment of God's purpose for all that he has made. He enters as the pioneer who goes before us (3.1; 12.2) and as a priest to 'appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (9.24). This is the beginning of eschatological time. The cross is thus the pivotal moment of creation, for it happens 'at the end of the age' (9.26) and is consummated by the risen Christ ascending into God's presence in the coming city (13.14) of the world to come (2.5).<sup>633</sup>

The sacrifice metaphor, then, relates to past, present and future. The sacrifice took place in history, enables present access to a holy God, and, because it is a major element in the qualification of Christ to be high priest, functions as part of that high priesthood's embodiment of hope. The high priesthood of Christ is in fact, as indicated, the oath that guarantees this hope (cf. 6.17-20; 7.17-19,27,28). Sacrifice can perform these functions because it has an eschatological quality; it is performed at the consummation of the ages (9.26), the point at which history has in principle reached its goal.

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<sup>633</sup> Christopher Cocksworth, 'The Cross, Our Worship and Our Living', *op. cit.* 115-6.



Hebrews does not spell out in any detail its expectations for the future. There will be a final judgment (4.12; 6.2; 9.27; 10.27-31). There will also be a second coming of Christ. The one who appeared "at the end of the ages" to remove sin once for all will appear a second time to complete the salvation of those who eagerly await him (9:26-28). That Day is approaching (10.25), and in connection with believers' full reception of what God has promised, it is asserted that "the one who is coming will come and will not delay" (10.36,37). This is a coming from heaven which will be the realisation of Christ's cosmic inheritance (cf. 1.2), the completion of salvation through the subjection to him of the world to come (cf. 2.5-8). All this suggests that Hebrews has not abandoned the major strand of Jewish and early Christian eschatology that expected not simply a spiritual heavenly salvation but one that included transformed bodies and a transformed cosmos. "According to the promise, there would come a time when the holiness of God enters the profane world, penetrates it and makes it holy. The time will be eschatological time..."<sup>634</sup>

In Hebrews, Christ's permanent achievement in establishing the new order is seen in terms of his exaltation to and location in heaven as high priest, and so the "already" of salvation is tied to heaven in its connotation of the uncreated realm of God. But that does not entail that this heaven is completely separated from humans and the temporal-spatial world which they inhabit. If their heavenly high priest completely identified himself with their humanity (2.14; 4.15) and if believers have links to heaven in the present, then the consummation of their salvation will fully embrace not only their created existence but also all created existence. Eschatological salvation for Hebrews is not some release of the soul from the body with its return to the invisible world of eternal reality. That which lasts for ever and is at present realised primarily in heaven is the salvation of God's kingdom or rule (12.28), which includes the subjection of all things to Christ (2.8) as he inherits the cosmos created through him (1.2).

The Suffering Servant and the High Priest of Hebrews can also be linked to the Shekhinah. In establishing the identity of the High Priest, Hebrews begins with Sonship language (1.2ff) before moving to a discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood (5.1ff). In describing the Son, the writer employs Wisdom terms (from Wisdom 7.22-26) in that the world is created and sustained through the Son, who bears the very stamp of God's character and essence. The Son has all the qualities of Wisdom in terms of God's immanent presence in the world, hence the links

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<sup>634</sup> *ibid.* 114.



with Shekhinah. This is the Christian theological version of Shekhinah in which the agency of the Spirit, as God's eschatological transcendence, rests on the Son, who, as God's immanent presence in God's creation brings it to consummation as its heir, (Heb. 1.2).

The Spirit is thus the agent of the Father's determination to bring all things into relation to himself through Christ: the agent of God's perfecting of the creation. Therefore we must say that whenever the created order, in any of its levels or aspects, is able to praise its maker, there is the agency of the Spirit. In this respect, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead serves as a model for the possibilities for the transformation of matter in general.<sup>635</sup>

It is therefore proposed that the metaphor of sacrifice is a potentially helpful way of construing an objective account of atonement that will embrace all of God's creatures, human and non-human. Sacrifice is a way of making holy, of returning to God that which is God's own. To reiterate: "...this sacrifice of life is not a mere killing, a sending into nothingness, but it is a surrender of life to what is holy, and at the same time an incorporation into the holy...body, soul, living thing is dedicated to and incorporated into the holy."<sup>636</sup>

From Gunton's discussion of atonement metaphors, it can be inferred that the sacrificial metaphor embodies both objective and subjective aspects which are distinctly relevant and applicable to the present ecological issues and concerns. That is:

Human life, soiled in a soiled universe, is deprived of its proper direction by sin and its consequences...We live in an interrelated universe, so that one part of our world is only what it is by virtue of its relation to all other parts...To talk of sin is to talk of a way in which the world is affected by a breach in relationships between humankind and our creator...[S]acrifice is a term which has served to express a number of similar features shared by those human actions designed to restore relations between God and the world. In the New Testament, features of traditional ways of speech are taken up and combined in such a way that the Father's giving of the Son and Jesus' giving of his life constitute the only sacrifice which can wipe away the accumulated filth. Why? Because in Jesus God deals with the heart. The Letter to the Hebrews (8.8-12) argues that a

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<sup>635</sup> Colin Gunton, *Theology Through the Theologians*, *op. cit.* 120.

<sup>636</sup> R Needham, *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, *op. cit.* 107-8.

reconstituting of relations has taken place in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The promise of Jer. 31.31-4 is fulfilled: 'I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.' It is to be noted that this letter puts very high on its agenda the anthropological question: why has the human creation not fulfilled the promise in Psalm 8 of human stewardship of the creation? The answer is that it has: we do see Jesus. Jesus is the one - 'the author and pioneer of our faith' - who creates and inaugurates a renewal...<sup>637</sup>

What can be understood from this is the importance within understandings of atonement of human response, that is, in the subjective side and exemplary aspects. This is a particularly marked concern in the context of all creation for, of course, it is humans who have, in large measure, brought about the ecological crisis. Furthermore, as discussed at the outset, Christian attitudes and the history of Christian theologising have played some role in this. While the Lynn White thesis is rejected for some of its more crude logic and illegitimate conclusions about the nature of Christian teaching, it has been conceded that Christianity has served to legitimate certain scientific and technological developments that have had disastrous ecological consequences and deleterious effects for the environment. "Most of the Christian tradition in the modern period, understanding the God-given human dominion over the animals as permission to treat them with regard to nothing other than their usefulness to humans, has encouraged and colluded with modern western society's spoliation of the earth, which is currently exterminating whole species daily."<sup>638</sup>

So it is up to human beings generally to learn to act in accordance with the ways that God has called us to be - indeed to be more human - and to Christian theology in particular to widen its scope of theorising about God's purposes for God's creation and the ways in which it construes redemption. Gunton refers to stewardship of the creation: the role given to human beings in creation, to till the garden and to keep it (Gen. 2.15). That humankind has fallen short in this regard has given rise to environmental degradation and ecological crisis. To 'see Jesus' is to understand what is the good, to desire to do the good and to try actually to do the good. The subjective and exemplary side of atonement is a repentance, a

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<sup>637</sup> Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, *op. cit.* 138-9.

<sup>638</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals", *op. cit.* 21. It is interesting that Bauckham suggests the symbol of the life of Francis of Assisi as a model for "living fraternally ... with wild creatures, and experiencing thereby the grace of otherness which God gives us in the diversity of the animal creation and which is missed when animals are reduced merely to usefulness or threat." In this, Bauckham reaches a similar conclusion to Lynn White.



transformation and a redirection towards fulfilment of potential: human being becoming human.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the moves Moltmann made when focusing on ecological matters was to develop a more marked exemplary account, premised on subjective response. Not surprisingly, given his consistent use of the metaphor of justice, much of his praxis-oriented discussion is grounded in legal categories. "The *reconciliation* of the cosmos is the restoration of the *righteousness* and *justice* of the cosmos... .Reconciliation through Christ is the foundation for a community based on law, in the cosmos as well as among God's people. Just as human dignity is the source of all human rights, so the dignity of creation is the source of all the rights of animals, plants and the earth."<sup>639</sup>

Moltmann cites the Universal Declaration on Animal Rights 1978 as the basis for Christian action in this respect, arguing that a codification of the rights of the earth, animals and plants must be observed 'before all else' in order for the desired 'community of creation' to be a 'community based on law'. This would then necessarily outlaw ecologically disastrous endeavours such as aggressive and rampant deforestation and cruel and disrespectful factory farming practices. A failure to recognise all things as God's things has led to an 'aggressive and a-social ethic' in the modern world leading to, *inter alia*, increasingly polluted air which all creatures have to breathe. Indeed there is a touch of prudence and utility in some of Moltmann's recommendations, which have as their ultimate aim, reconciliation between God, humanity and nature "quite directly and immediately, so that a community with nature based on law and capable of survival may be created."<sup>640</sup>

Because human beings are embodied and natural beings, it is any case impossible to implement human rights without at the same time observing the rights of animals, plants and the earth. Without the formulation of their ecological rights and duties, the rights of human beings in their own lives remain unrealistic. Rights for non-human creatures could be maintained and enforced if guardians and trustees for them were to be appointed by human courts.<sup>641</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, *op. cit.* 307. See pp 151-2 for a critique of some of Moltmann's use of 'rights' concepts and language.

<sup>640</sup> *ibid.* 312.

<sup>641</sup> *ibid.* 308-9.



As demonstrated and discussed in the previous chapter, Moltmann's continued use of the metaphor of justice in the context of the redemption of nature employed the notion of sanctification as the bridge between justification and glorification. Sanctification involved the development of appropriate sensibilities such that the rights and dignity of all living things might be recognised, and on this basis, to act in such a way as to work towards the 'justice of the cosmos': "[T]oday sanctification means defending God's creation against human aggression, exploitation and destruction."<sup>642</sup> More interesting in the context of this particular enquiry is, perhaps, his later statement: "I believe that today sanctification first of all means rediscovering the *holiness of life* and the divine mystery in all created things, and defending it against the arbitrary manipulations of life and the destruction of the earth through personal and institutional acts of violence."<sup>643</sup> But, not surprisingly, he does not develop the notion of the holy in any sacrificial terms. Instead he moves into an ethical discussion based in Schweitzer's case for reverence for life. Essentially, in each of Moltmann's statements about the meaning for today of sanctification, he is voicing support for what is surely the most popular Christian response to the ecological crisis, that is, stewardship. A call to environmental stewardship is indeed the clarion call to Christians to be 'green' or 'greener' Christians, and there is an increasing literature of the type that falls into the 'caring' category.<sup>644</sup>

Indeed Moltmann has contributed to a collection of essays which address stewardship specifically.<sup>645</sup> Here he offers three related proposals. First, in terms of the development of appropriate sensibilities, he recommends the need for a 'new cosmic spirituality': "[I]n cosmic spirituality we recognize and revere God's presence in every creature and hence implement the creation-community. Human culture and the nature of this planet Earth can thus find a new sustainable harmony."<sup>646</sup> Secondly, in terms of action, he brings this sensibility to bear in support of the notion of 'human beings and nature together in covenant with God'. The concept of covenant allows him, of course, to couch a recommendation in legal terms that will underpin a claim, grounded in the Noachic covenant, to

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<sup>642</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.* 172.

<sup>643</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, transl Margaret Kohl, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, (London: SCM, 1997) 48.

<sup>644</sup> For example, *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action*, *op. cit.* The title makes the point. This collection includes and is prefaced by 'An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation', 17-22, to which the contributors respond in some way.

<sup>645</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "God's covenant and our responsibility", in *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action*, *op. cit.* 107-113.

<sup>646</sup> *ibid.* 110.



dignity and rights for every creature. Moreover he proposes (again) that these claims be enshrined in law.

...[O]ut of this (divine) covenant with us and our descendants after us and *every living creature* follow the *rights of nature*...All living beings are partners in God's covenant, each in its own way...On these grounds, I propose that the following sentences should be included in national constitutions:

The natural world is under the special protection of the government. through the way in which it acts, the state shows respect for the natural environment and protects it from exploitation and destruction by human beings *for its own sake*.<sup>647</sup>

And thirdly, in terms of practice, he suggests a form of celebration or remembrance of the notion of the 'Sabbath of the Earth'. This is based in the ecological wisdom that is replete within the Old Testament and which leads to a special blessing both of humanity and nature. He finds the Sabbath to be particularly significant for the land: 'And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you; and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest which it had not in your sabbaths when you dwelt upon it' (Lev.26.33ff). As Moltmann rightly says, this is 'indeed a remarkable ecological interpretation of the Babylonian exile.' That is, God chose to save God's land, so he allowed an exile sufficiently long for the land to recover its nutrients. "We should be warned by this old story: uninterrupted exploitation of the land will lead to exile of its inhabitants, and ultimately to the disappearance of human beings from the earth."<sup>648</sup> This is indeed cautionary, though arguably very pessimistic from one who places such value on hope, and who regards despair as a major sin. And despite his use of the Noachic covenant, clearly he finds no comfort in the efficacy of Noah's sacrifice! (Gen. 8.20ff)

As a celebration or remembrance of the Sabbath of the Earth, Moltmann goes on to suggest the instigation of 'Earth Day' in order 'to celebrate creation'. This is essentially a repentance and a commitment, expressed again in terms of justice.

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<sup>647</sup> *ibid.* 111.

<sup>648</sup> *ibid.* 112.



"On 'Earth Day' we should bow and beg forgiveness for the injustice we have inflicted on the Earth, so that we humans may once more be accepted into the community of the Earth; on 'Earth Day' we could be challenged anew to renew the covenant which God made with Noah and the Earth."<sup>649</sup>

Stewardship is seen as a way of responding to the dominion humans are given in creation; human beings are to play an administrative role in which God has delegated certain responsibilities to those who are in God's image. In a range of ways, this is an appropriate response. In the first place, in a common sense way, it is simply 'better practice' than either an actively exploitative practice or a passively uncaring practice that colludes and connives ultimately with 'worst practice'. Secondly, the stewardship model insists that non-human beings are valued by God, in and of themselves, and therefore good practice is not merely self-interested or utilitarian. And thirdly, it attempts to understand the creatureliness of human beings. For example, 'An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation', which is essentially a stewardship charter, states, "[M]en, women, and children, have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are *creatures*, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures."<sup>650</sup>

But frequently there is no specification of the nature of this creaturehood: what constitutes human creatureliness within its own ecological situatedness? As Scott shows in his critique of stewardship, any attempts made within the stewardship model to understand how human beings are *imago mundi* as well as *imago Christi* are determined by a prior exemplarist narrowing which leads inevitably to a conventional theological schema: "Christ, Church, World, in which stewardship operates as the core concept for articulating Christian responsibility in and towards the world."<sup>651</sup> What we have here, then, is theology reduced to its functions and practices. Moltmann is, however, not vulnerable to this criticism. As shown in the first chapter, there is a difference between what was categorised 'modernising provincialism' and 'anti-modernising provincialism'. Moltmann was placed in the latter category, which is marked, *inter alia*, by its attempts to rethink the relations between human and non-human nature. It was marked also by the fact that it offers an objective account of atonement. On the other hand, the 'modernising provincialist' category in which more thorough-going accounts of

<sup>649</sup> *ibid.* 113.

<sup>650</sup> *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action*, *op. cit.* 20.

<sup>651</sup> Peter Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 218.



stewardship can be found, were marked, *inter alia*, by a sharp distinction maintained between humanity and nature, and by a subjective account of atonement.

There is a further problem prevalent within the stewardship model regarding the relation between human and non-human beings. Scott isolates the problem precisely. He quotes from Hall's seminal work on 'The Steward', thus: "[T]he Steward is a particularly apt metaphor for humanity because it encapsulates the two sides of human relatedness, the relation to God on the one hand and to non-human creatures on the other. The human being is, as God's steward, accountable to God and responsible for its fellow creatures."<sup>652</sup>

As Scott points out, it is clear how readily "the claim to relatedness slides ... into an affirmation of responsibility; the claim about human situatedness slips into a moral claim."<sup>653</sup> That is, theology has given way to ethics, and been reduced to right practice. What has been lost is any sense that non-human creatures have God-given ends of their own, and that they stand on their own, as they are, before God. Scott asks, "[M]ay God not have purposes for non-human nature directly which do not require mediation by human beings? How are we helped in then thinking through the relations between humanity and non-human nature if such reconciling mediation is worked through by humanity? ...It suggests two abstractions - humanity and nature - one of which is mediated by the other."<sup>654</sup> Thus, any theological question about the relations between God, humanity and nature becomes filtered through a certain determining framework. This determining framework is exemplarism. In the language of atonement theory, stewardship is the outcome of subjective response; it is exemplarist, that is, the objective side of the subjective pole.

But Moltmann also avoids this criticism about mediation. He makes a range of attempts to express that 'all living beings are partners in the same covenant, each in its own way'. "The church of Christ will know herself in the light of God's Word and Spirit as the advance radiance and beginning of God's presence in

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<sup>652</sup> Douglas John Hall, The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and New York: Friendship Press, 1986), cited by Peter Scott, A Political Theology of Nature, *op. cit.* 215

<sup>653</sup> Peter Scott, A Political Theology of Nature, *op. cit.* 215.

<sup>654</sup> *ibid.* 215. Richard Bauckham and Oliver O'Donovan make related points, though each rather differently, and without Scott's precise conceptualisation. Richard Bauckham, 'Stewardship and relationship', and Oliver O'Donovan, 'Where were you ...?' , both in RJ Berry, the Care of Creation, *op. cit.* 99-106; 90-93.

Glory, through the new creation of all things."<sup>655</sup> One of the moves he made when focusing on ecological concerns was to work out an *analogia relationis* such that while human beings are in the image of God, the model of relation between God and nature is one in which nature mirrors God, and hence God sees Godself in God's work.<sup>656</sup>

There are crucial weaknesses with exemplarist accounts. They do not stand alone, as indicated in chapter two, and need the framework of a 'stable' atonement metaphor for their theological intelligibility. Without this, exemplarism consists of an abstraction of ethics, and reduces theology to right practice. This is the problem with the stewardship model. Where ought it to 'fit', Christian theologically speaking, within the vocabulary of soteriology? Put another way, how might stewardship - as the exemplary aspect of the subjective side of atonement - be appropriately and properly anchored theologically, that is, to its objective side? However, this question applies rather differently to Moltmann. As has been shown, Moltmann is not vulnerable to the charges just outlined by Scott's criticism of stewardship. Moltmann's exemplary account is not unstable, floating free, as it were, without the mooring of an objective side. Rather, his account is, in a sense, coherent: he works with an atonement metaphor of justice which shapes both the objective and the subjective/exemplary aspects. This coherence is its strength. But this strength is outweighed by a crucial weakness: that is, it is the wrong metaphor. In terms of the redemption of nature, the metaphor that should come to the fore is sacrifice.

It has been shown, in chapter four, that Moltmann's objective account of atonement proved effective, in many ways, in terms of embracing non-human nature in a redemptive schema; he was able to negotiate the necessary moves through a modified and enriched soteriological vocabulary which enabled him to apply essentially personal language to the non-personal through categories of analogy. The criticism of his account is one of inadequacy in terms of structure and theory, and what might be claimed as a rather alarmingly thin understanding of sacrifice. In terms of his subjective account with its exemplary aspects, the problem seems to lie with the actual language he uses and with the theological blind alleys up which he seems to disappear. The difficulties can be stated briefly, in part because certain aspects of critical discussion appear in the previous chapter. His resolute adherence to the justice metaphor is significant here. In his

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<sup>655</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "God's covenant and our responsibility", *op. cit.* 111.

<sup>656</sup> As discussed on pp 152-3.



praxis-oriented discussion, his recommendations were generally framed in legal language. While there was a wish clearly to invoke Old Testament categories of justice and righteousness and the concept of covenant, the practical outworking emerged shaped by enlightenment concepts of rights and justice, and therefore, it is not very satisfying, Christian theologically.

Moreover, he has opted for unconvincing claims to rights for animals and dignity for all living things; again these are enlightenment terms. But also such claims cannot adequately be grounded. Rights and dignity inhere essentially in human beings. Rights for animals not to be tortured and their rights to kind treatment can certainly be grounded with biblical prescriptions, though Moltmann does not actually take that route. And there are ways of construing an extended circle of concern that underpins forms of moral standing without resorting to animal rightists' claims for non-human personhood or Singer's speciesism thesis.<sup>657</sup> Moreover, his attempts at analogy are not persuasive in this connection: for example, '[J]ust as human dignity is the source of all human rights, so the dignity of creation is the source of all the rights of animals, plants and the earth.' What are the rights that are here being claimed? Clearly not rights to life, as people have to eat *something*, though not necessarily animals. The claim would surely be for all creatures to be allowed to be what they were called by God to be, and thereby to praise God, who will look at what God has made and see that it is good. But there are more satisfying ways to express this theologically than through a rights based discourse, which actually does not express it at all.

Moltmann limits his own theological options by his blindness to sacrifice. He is actually unable to address his own concern about dealing with a nature 'infected with poisonous waste'. In his own stated endeavour to 'rediscover the holiness of life' he resorts to ethics premised on ideas of the reverence for life, and in seeking 'the divine mystery in all created things' he responds with the notion of developing 'a new cosmic spirituality'. Both of these responses seem more like the language of Fox and McFague: yielding insights certainly, but not the basis for a specifically Christian account of life and practice nor an adequate Christian anthropology.

In a way, it seems as if Moltmann has somehow 'shoe-horned' his praxis oriented or stewardship account into the framework of the justice metaphor, where it is uneasy and ill-fitting. Certainly it does not have the theoretical problem of the

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<sup>657</sup> See n 492 for relevant references and discussion.

'floating' stewardship accounts which are adrift of any mooring at all, but it does suffer from being tied up to an inappropriate anchor. For stewardship, rightly and theologically appropriated - which is vital - is the practical outworking, that is, the subjective and exemplary side, of the metaphor of sacrifice.

Rae, in a theological engagement with the stewardship model, has concluded, via an excursion into the Johannine seven signs, that stewardship should be understood rightly as obedience. He writes,

...if we are to retain the notion of stewardship, then it must be clear that, Christianly understood, stewardship does not entail that humanity is the Lord and master of the world, even if only as deputy while the true Lord of all is absent. Rather it means obedience, to the Lord who is to be found in our midst...Self-sacrifice rather than selfish indulgence; the offering of all things to God, rather than the accumulation of things for one's own ends; the laying aside of power, rather than the will to dominate; the acceptance of lowliness and even suffering for the sake of the glory of God: none of these amount to rules for ecological action, but they do represent an ethos, or a Christian framework within which our stewardship of creation may be exercised in faithfulness to the author of creation himself. The biblical view is that such faithfulness has a direct impact upon the fruitfulness and blessing of the earth itself.<sup>658</sup>

Rae rightly attempts here to place stewardship within an adequate theology, rather than leave it in its rather free-floating, semi-detached (or more likely detached) form that 'amounts to rules for ecological action'. In any case, following some prescribed set of rules merely for their supposed effects is not an authentic way of being. A cognitive choice must be made in order for any action to have moral content, and hence to be complementary to commitment to God. Consciousness precedes and enables cognitive choice, and such consciousness is, in part, an outcome of the subjective aspect of atonement. As it happens, Moltmann's praxis-oriented account fits well with Rae's recommendations here for stewardship, well construed, but Moltmann would shun the implications. Rae nominates obedience as the overarching theological category. In atonement metaphor terms, this is sacrifice.<sup>659</sup> Taking account of some of Rae's key terms

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<sup>658</sup> Murray Rae, 'To Render Praise: Humanity in God's World', Paper given at Consultation on Environmental Stewardship, Windsor Castle, September 15-17, 2000.

<sup>659</sup> The sacrificial myth (in the sense of root metaphor or conceptual archetype) of the Old Testament is the Binding of Isaac, Gen. 22. Analysis of this narrative shows Abraham as a type of heroic faith and obedience. The Binding as a story is a myth of God's will for God's people, revealed through a conceptual archetype, who is Abraham. The narrator has given a root



here - obedience, self-sacrifice, the offering of all things to God, the acceptance of lowliness and even suffering for the sake of God - returns us to the soteriological imagery of Christ as Suffering Servant and High Priest.

Once more the Letter to the Hebrews may be helpful. It provides clues to a more adequate account of stewardship as the subjective and exemplary side of an atonement metaphor of sacrifice.

The Spirit we have received (6.4) is the one through whom God perfected the humanity of Christ and the one through whom God forms Christ's perfection in us as we participate by the Spirit in the ascended life of Christ. The Spirit is the one through whom Christ offered himself to the Father (9.14) and so the Spirit is the one through whom Christ now offers to the Father our praise and prayer, our confession of him and our commitment to his way, as we bring them to him, our priest who, through a life of obedience, leading to the sacrifice for sin, has become for all who obey him 'the source of eternal salvation' (5.9).<sup>660</sup>

Christ's sacrifice was the culmination of a life of obedience: as High Priest, the cosmic Suffering Servant "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" and "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5.7,8). The human response to Christ's sacrifice is to make sacrifices of praise, i.e. words as the fruit of lips, through Christ to God (13.15), and sacrifices of good works, i.e. deeds and acts of kindness and in solidarity toward others (13.16). Stewardship as good and right praxis finds its place here, within a broader framework that includes worship practice. To return to Moltmann: he does sketch out ways in which church must discover 'a new role', for 'her scope will not be limited to the human world alone.' "The church of the cosmic Christ will be oriented towards the whole of the cosmos, and therefore be in fellowship with the groaning creatures and the wounded and crying Earth today."<sup>661</sup>

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metaphor, obedience; a root metaphor is re-enacted and reiterated through ritual. The narrator has given a ritual, Isaac, as a burnt sacrifice, (though he is bound, but then spared by God). Sacrifice is the paradigm of Israel's worship, revealed through the obedience of the conceptual archetype, Abraham. Hence the connection: sacrifice and obedience. See Jo Milgrom, The Akedah: A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art, (Berkeley: Bibal, 1988); Simon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, (London: Almond, 1989). It might be noted also that Barth's claim 'To say atonement is to say Jesus Christ' is framed in a discussion of servanthood and obedience. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/I, *op. cit.* 159.

<sup>660</sup> Christopher Cocksworth, 'The Cross, Our Worship and Our Living', *op. cit.* 127.

<sup>661</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "God's covenant and our responsibility", *op. cit.* 110.

But when he offers an account of how this new understanding might be enacted in worship, his suggestion is somewhat flabby: Earth Day. This is most unpersuasive. He considers that an Earth Day, to celebrate creation, might be added 'to the great festivals of the church year, i.e. Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost'. But such 'Days' cannot just be added on, as it were. The 'great festivals of the church' that he cites form the rich mythology, the conceptual archetypes of Christianity. These root metaphors are powerful in part because they are such well-known detailed stories that have been reiterated and re-enacted throughout Christian history. Arguably it might be more appropriate to try to build into the worship of these 'great festivals' some distinct and explicit content that would be a celebration of creation, though much care would be needed about how creation might be construed. Somewhat curiously, Moltmann goes on to suggest immediately a date for an Earth Day. He says that already many Americans celebrate an Earth Day on 22 April. "How would it be if in Europe we were to declare 27 April, the day of the Chernobyl disaster, such a day?"<sup>662</sup> This seems not too well thought through: a repentance yes, but not a celebration.

The call to be holy is a call to worship, not as an individual making an independent response in thanks for what God has done in Christ for all. Rather it is a call to participate in community in the hallowing of the name of God. Atonement is at the heart of worship, insofar as in worship we choose to participate actively in Christ and in his atoning act for us. The High Priest is the necessary presence in the midst of the praising of the Father's name, for he offers there an atoning liturgy in his life and death for us. Sacramental use of matter is not matter rendered away from the natural order, but a return to the truly natural order in which we receive the gift of God's love. Of the mystery of the Eucharist, Irenaeus says:

How can (heretics) consistently maintain that the bread over which thanks have been given is the Body of their Lord, and the cup His Blood, if they do not call Himself the Son of the Creator of the world, that is, His Word, through whom the wood bears fruit, and the springs gush forth, and the earth gives 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn of the ear'?<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>662</sup> *ibid.* 113.

<sup>663</sup> Against Heresies 4.18.4.



There is clearly much more that could be said here, with regard to Eucharist and other worship practices.<sup>664</sup> As a brief example, Linzey<sup>665</sup> has, for some thirty years, been writing and developing Christian theology of animals, including liturgy. He recommends 'the Eucharist for all things' because the Eucharist is the work of thanksgiving which humanity, in its exalted state, must represent to God 'on behalf of all creation'. Indeed, it is only when human beings recognise their own creaturely being in relation to other creatures as 'a dependent lordship' that they will be able to properly exercise their 'office of priestly dominion'.<sup>666</sup> However, Linzey considers that "Christian liturgy is remarkably unliberated in relation to creation and especially animals. Despite the obvious interest in creation which characterised early formulations of eucharistic prayers, modern liturgy is moribund in its humanocentricity."<sup>667</sup> Bauckham offers Mark 1.13 as a christological alternative to the Green Man, for our need now is for religious symbols of the human relationship to nature, as observed already by many in the Green Movement. "Mark's image of Jesus with the wild animals can be retrieved as the christological warrant for and symbol of this possibility (of brotherly and sisterly community with animals), given in creation, given back in messianic redemption."<sup>668</sup>

In making this proposal - to develop a construal of the cosmic Suffering Servant as an atonement metaphor of sacrifice - it is my intention to pick up on Moltmann's comments quoted at the beginning of this chapter, in which he said, "...My own propositions are intended to be a challenge to other people to think for themselves - and of course they are a challenge to objective refutation too..." This chapter's suggestions are intended indeed to respond to his challenge to think for oneself, though not to the challenge to refute him. Certainly, a critique of his narrow view

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<sup>664</sup> Peter Scott, however, strikes a cautionary note when he says, "In a delicious irony, the final theological terminus (of stewardship) may be a treatment of the sacraments. Yet such a treatment presupposes the distribution of grace by a universal church - and such universality is precisely not available in this strange post-Christian world in which we live. Thus the churches contribute to the moralising of Christianity. We can be sure that if such moralising gains ground then the functionalising of Christianity is not far behind." *A Political Theology of Nature*, *op. cit.* 218.

<sup>665</sup> For example, *Animal Rights: a Christian Assessment*, *op. cit.*; *Animal Theology*, *op. cit.*; Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*, (London: Mowbray, 1997). Linzey mentions that while, as a student in 1976, his first *Order of Service for Animal Welfare* for the RSPCA was regarded with 'mirth' by his fellow students, it nevertheless has now run to six editions. *The Church Times*, 1 October 2004. What used to be considered rather 'cranky' thirty years ago, is now seen as relatively normal, if not yet mainstream. As noted previously, ecological endeavours over thirty years are on a similar trajectory.

<sup>666</sup> Andrew Linzey, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*, *op. cit.* 94-5.

<sup>667</sup> *ibid.* 109-10.

<sup>668</sup> Richard Bauckham, 'Jesus and the Wild Animals' *op. cit.* 21.

of sacrifice is entirely intentional, but, overall, the aim is here more modest: to offer a proposal that might be seen as complementary to his "grands oeuvres".

Clearly this doctrinal proposal is in embryo, but it is hoped that it might, nevertheless, make a contribution to the broader task of constructing an ecological theology that is adequately soteriologically grounded. The connection between ecology and atonement is a lively issue in theology. A few years ago I was at times met with astonishment when I revealed the dual foci of my research, and my intention to try to understand them together. I would be asked what on earth atonement had to do with animals, nature or anything other than persons. An ordained minister commented, "Surely God has enough on his plate saving souls to get around to worrying about non-human beings"! But such 'theologising' seems less prevalent these days. Just to quote a piece of recent news: "[L]iberal and Evangelical Christians ...could not agree on the basis of their faith when they met to discuss the doctrine of atonement last week...the 70 representatives had not been able to agree on the meaning of the atonement...Anger and protest were seen as part of God's love, but many wanted to distinguish sharply between anger and violence. They also wondered how atonement applied to the damage humans had done to the environment."<sup>669</sup>

It is a relevant question and it's on the table: not so cranky after all.

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<sup>669</sup> The Church Times, 16 July, 2004.



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